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THE BJP'S BIHAR GAME PLAN

LUXURY SPECIAL: FESTIVE TRENDS

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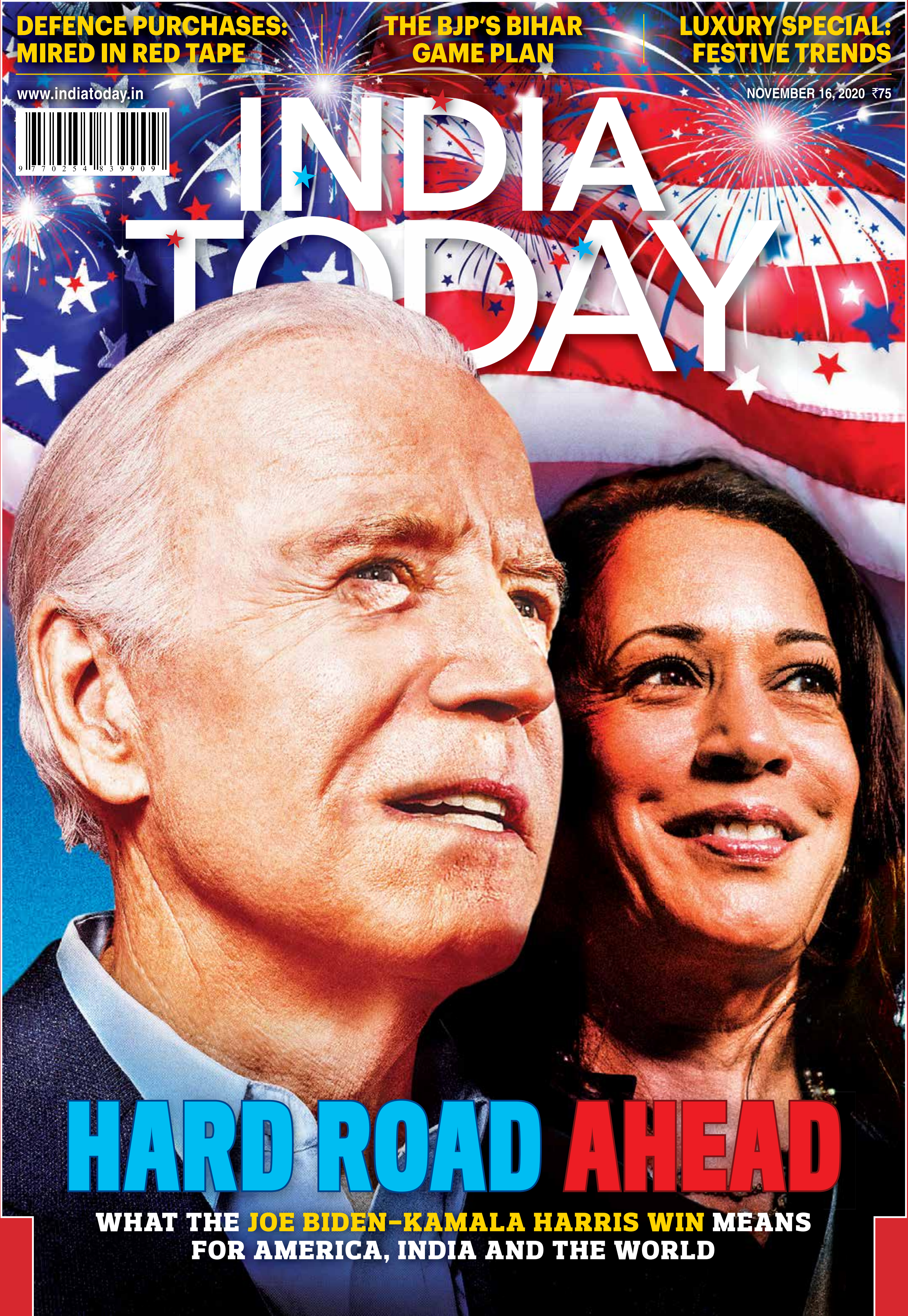

HARD ROAD AHEAD

WHAT THE **JOE BIDEN-KAMALA HARRIS WIN** MEANS FOR AMERICA, INDIA AND THE WORLD

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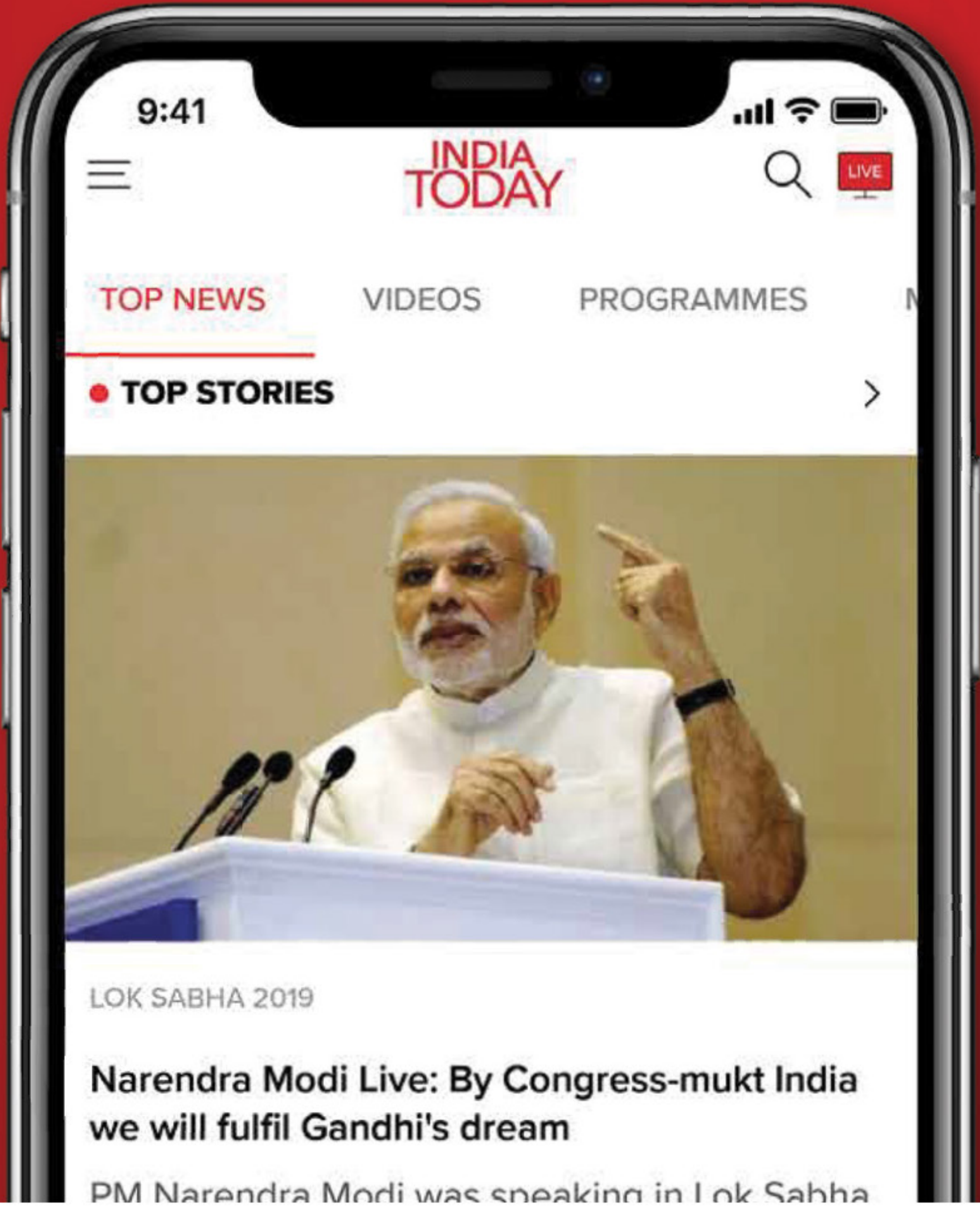
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FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The recent US presidential election had several binaries: Good vs Evil, Decency vs Indecency, Truth vs Lies, Racism vs Inclusion, Rich vs Poor, Unity vs Division, Reason vs Irrationality, Consensus vs Confrontation, Science vs Stupidity, Globalisation vs Isolationism. Fortunately for America and the world, the better side of human nature prevailed. Just about. I must say I was shocked at the byzantine American electoral process. Completely absurd that a president can be elected even after losing the popular vote—as Donald Trump did in 2016—and the chaotic counting process. We may not always get everything right, but we should feel proud of the efficient way our general elections are conducted, and the results announced. The victory of Joe Biden in a closely fought US presidential election is as much about the triumph of democracy as it is about the defeat of one of the most toxic presidents in US history, one who even tried to delegitimise the election. The 2020 vote, as Biden put it succinctly at the start of his campaign, was to restore the 'soul of America' and erase the 'darkness' that had descended on the country under Donald Trump.

The president, despite all his bluster, was already under a darkening cloud this year. Covid-19 has ravaged the United States, with 9.5 million cases and 234,000 fatalities as of November 5, making it the world's worst-affected country. Trump was slow to move against the pandemic and, by some accounts, even downplayed it initially. The impact of the virus on the US economy has been catastrophic—ending the longest recorded US expansion from 2009 to March 2020.

The former real estate tycoon from New York now joins a short list of just two other American presidents in the last half-century—Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush—who were defeated after a single term. They lost mainly because, as the memorable 1992 Bill Clinton campaign slogan put it, 'It's the economy, stupid!' In Trump's case, it would be, 'It was Covid-19, stupid!'

Trump's troubled legacy will endure long after he leaves the White House for various reasons. He moved the United States away from its leadership role in the world, shredded alliances and had the singular distinction of being a mercurial, unpredictable US president, feared by friends and foes alike. The task before President Biden, who at 77 is the oldest president-elect ever, is formidable, both at home and abroad. He has the arduous responsibility not just of restoring America's leadership role in global affairs and rebuilding alliances but also of integrating the 'untied' states of America, restoring racial harmony and fighting a likely second wave of Covid infections. The very fact that this contest went down to the wire indicates that Trumpism is alive and kicking in America. This does not bode well for the country's future. These are serious divides that will hamper the ability of the Biden administration to govern.

INDIA TODAY
HOW TO DEAL WITH TRUMP
March 13, 2017

INDIA TODAY
TRADING PUNCHES
July 8, 2019

INDIA TODAY
COMING UP TRUMPS
March 9, 2020

Our cover story, 'Hard Road Ahead', written by Group Editorial Director (Publishing) Raj Chengappa, looks at what the Biden-Harris partnership means for India and the world. The six experts we consulted are upbeat about the future. Former NSA Shivshankar Menon believes Biden's priorities will be domestic issues and not foreign policy. "He is going to have to try hard to bring jobs back, get manufacturing going and push for economic growth."

The high point of Indo-US ties under the Trump administration had been in the fields of defence and security. The two countries are now locked in a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, have signed three major foundational defence agreements and have arms deals worth billions of dollars in the pipeline.

Bilateral trade remains a thorny issue, though. Trump took India off a preferential trade scheme offering Indian exporters tariff-free access to US markets. Biden is unlikely to significantly steer away from his predecessor's 'America First' policy of focusing on the US markets and economic recovery. This could cause India some anxiety as the US is bound to emphasise access to India's markets.

The free pass that Trump gave India on human rights and on Kashmir could also become a point of friction in the months ahead, particularly with vice-president Kamala Harris. Harris, the first person of Indian origin to become vice-president, spoke up in the Senate in October 2019 in the context of the Indian government diluting Article 370, saying that "we have to remind the Kashmiris that they are not alone in the world" and "there is a need to intervene if the situation demands".

It remains to be seen what path Biden walks with China—whether he will choose to strike a deal or continue his predecessor's hostile policy. In any case, there are unlikely to be any huge surprises. However, in dealing with any American president, we should always remember what John Foster Dulles, the eminent Secretary of State during the Eisenhower presidency, had said: "America has no friends, only interests." That said, Biden marks a return to a predictable and, hopefully, a more responsible United States.

(Aroon Purie)

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A look at what the future holds for the luxury sector in a post-pandemic India and how digital tech will likely transform this space

Cover by NILANJAN DAS

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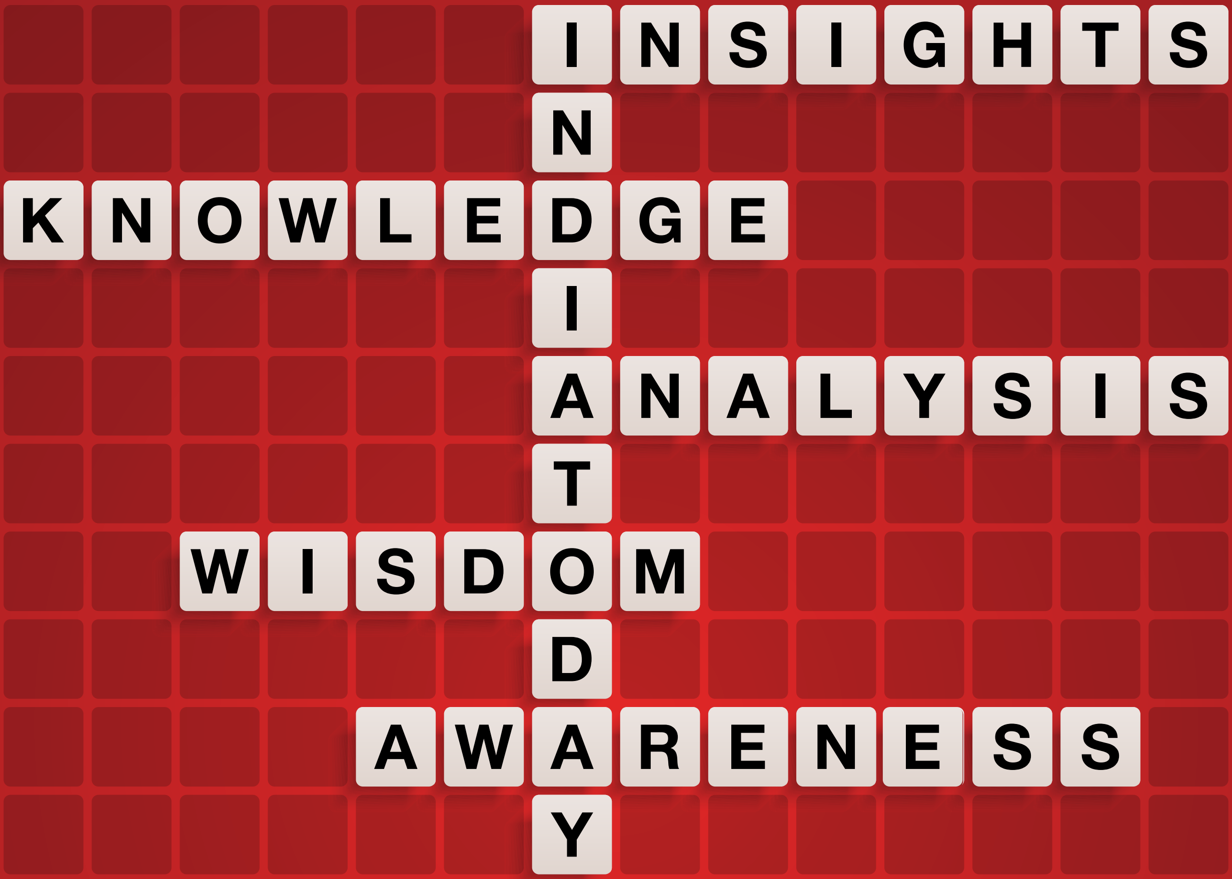
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NO SOCIAL DISTANCING
(Clockwise from above) A market in Mumbai before the Ganesh Chaturthi festival; Sarojini Nagar market in New Delhi; a market in Kolkata before the Durga Puja festival

GETTY IMAGES

COVID: SECOND WAVE

Too Close for Comfort

By Sonali Acharjee

On November 1, as Kerala opened its beaches to the public for the first time in months, the state had 89,675 active Covid cases, the second highest in the country after Maharashtra, up from only 16 active cases in May. Some experts attribute the spike in case numbers entirely to public complacency, to people focusing more on the economic cost of lockdowns than the reason they are being imposed and the public health benefits of doing so. And now, though health officials have warned against a hasty easing of restrictions on movement and public gatherings, beaches, parks, museums and other areas of tourist interest have been opened up. What this throws into relief about the challenge of containing the spread of the virus is that the economic costs of a lockdown or even severe containment are too high for governments to ignore. Hence, the new state predisposition to opening up, even while insisting that people take necessary precautions to ensure their own safety and of those they are likely to be in touch with.

"There has been pressure from both sides—the public health administration and the economy," says a nodal officer from the Kerala government's health department. "On one hand, the festive season, particularly Onam celebrations, sent numbers rising. So, doctors and scientists are critical of reopening public spaces. But equally, one cannot ignore the rising public discontent and the lack of jobs. Even if we kept the state closed, people are frustrated enough to ignore restrictions. So we decided to take a chance. But if things do not improve, we might have to enforce a lockdown."

On the public health front, there is evidence that lockdowns do work. In Australia's Victoria, after a 112-day lockdown, on November 4, the state recorded no new Covid cases for the

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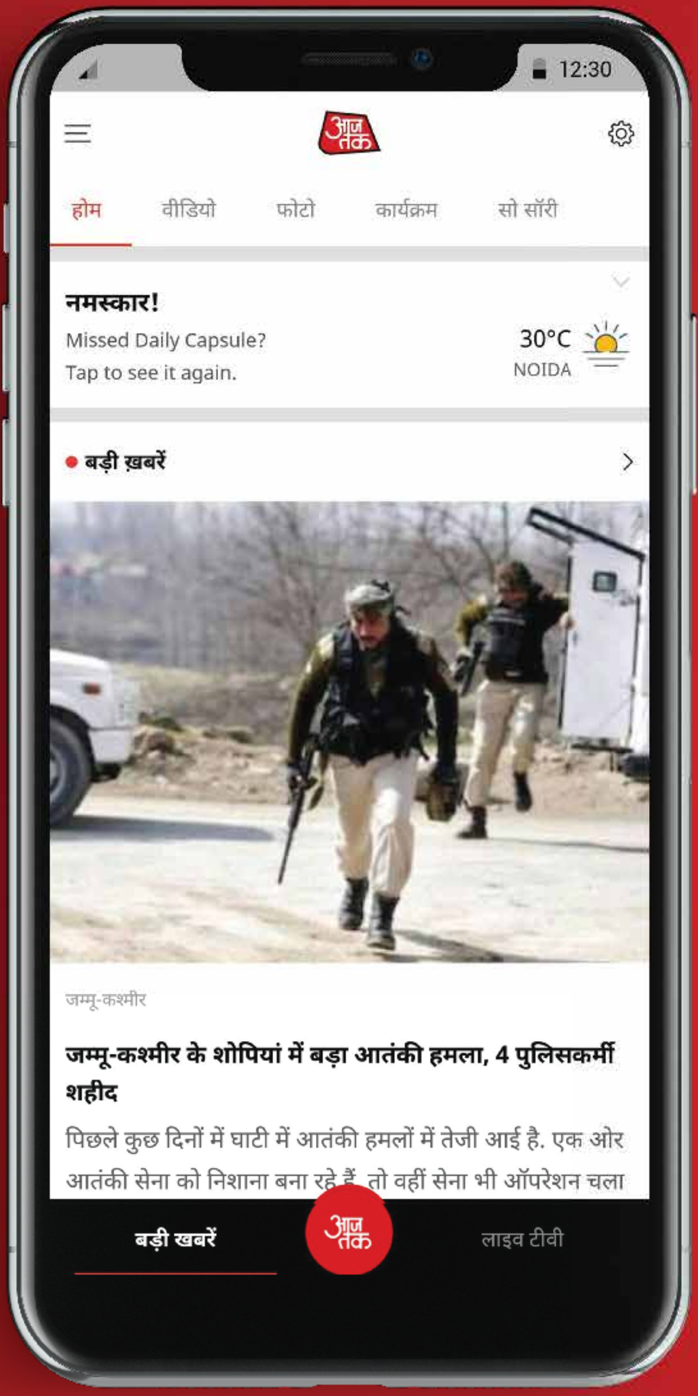
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जम्मू-कश्मीर

जम्मू-कश्मीर के शोपियां में बड़ा आतंकी हमला, 4 पुलिसकर्मी शहीद

पिछले कुछ दिनों में घाटी में आतंकी हमलों में तेजी आई है. एक ओर आतंकी सेना को निशाना बना रहे हैं, तो वहीं सेना भी ऑपरेशन चला

fourth day in a row. While the lockdown was strictly enforced through surveillance and police supervision, economic conditions also helped, including a low unemployment rate—4.8 per cent—and government benefits to make it possible for the state's residents to afford not to leave their homes. Kerala has no such advantage—the employment rate was 26.5 per cent in May, and many have few or no savings to fall back on, forcing them to step out of their homes to work.

Mental health professionals working with Covid patients highlight that financial instability is a major reason for both public discontent and lockdown violations. “Many patients say they are anxious because a relative of theirs is out working during the pandemic,” says Dr Anil Bhatia, a community psychologist. “They point out that they have no option but to work—when you have to make ends meet, there have to be very strong reasons for someone to remain indoors.

Awareness of the risks is a good place to start, followed by a recognition by authorities of why people are breaking the rules.” Dr B.N. Gangadhar, director of NIMHANS, Bengaluru, also highlights the psychological aspect: “To ensure that people behave responsibly, authorities have to realise that safety measures must consider not just physical health but also mental health.”

So far, there are only stray examples in India of how strong community engagement can help control case numbers. Kerala itself is one such example—in the early months of the pandemic, public outreach programmes included a 24-hour helpline to increase awareness about Covid safety measures, offer counselling and to build community spirit, highlighting that individuals maintaining safety protocols were not just protecting themselves—they were also acting in public interest. In Delhi, there are hopeful anecdotes from the private sector. For instance, Shantanu Deb, 36, who runs a small legal firm, says he has been allowing his employees to work from home even if he suffers financial consequences. “It is my duty to ensure they are safe,” he says, adding, “however, I have enough in the bank to allow myself to take it easy for a few months. It might have been different if I was hard up.” Efforts like these are crucial now, with a ‘second wave’ taking hold—the daily count of new cases is back up to 4,000-5,000, up from 1,200 in August.

AFTER THE FIRST WAVE

What has worked and what has not worked for countries around the world

France: Learned that mass gatherings had to be prevented after a single wedding in Paris led to 76 people getting infected. Earlier, weddings were permitted with 200 guests; now, all wedding functions are banned

Ireland: Despite having fewer cases than other European countries, it imposed a strict lockdown with a 5 km travel limit. Pandemic unemployment payments of €350 a week have helped gain public cooperation

Scotland: A survey showed that around 26 per cent of all cases in July were linked to visits to pubs or restaurants; all pubs and restaurants now closed

Australia: A 112-day lockdown in the state of Victoria led to zero new cases on November 1. The lockdown was supported by public engagement, police enforcement and an economic stimulus to keep the unemployment rate low

Vietnam: All travellers entering the country are quarantined for 14 days. Public awareness programmes conducted on asymptomatic Covid cases and the need for quarantines. A vigorous propaganda campaign using wartime imagery was used to unite the public. Has had only about 1,200 cases till date

South Korea: Managed to limit infections to only 26,000 cases by ensuring the public understood the need for universal mask coverage, self-isolation and testing. Masks are mandatory in all major cities

Spain: Giving in to economic pressure, it lifted most restrictions and reduced public engagement. On November 2, it recorded 55,000 new infections. Efforts are now being made to restrict public movement once again

Health officials have repeatedly appealed for people to avoid gatherings, wear masks in public and maintain good hand hygiene. But the apparent disregard of common sense seen in images overleaf, of milling crowds in markets during the festive season, challenge the belief that people know what's in their best interest. Experts point out that as winter sets in and states relax restrictions, infections are sure to increase. This is already visible in Delhi, which has seen a major increase in new cases—a 46 per cent spike—this past month. “In Delhi, cases are rising even as they are falling in other states,” says Dr Randeep Guleria, director of AIIMS, Delhi. “The state did not see an end to the second wave of infections, and the sudden public complacency has led to the curve rising again.” He says public vigilance has decreased visibly in the past month or so. “It almost looks as though people have forgotten Covid exists—they are not wearing masks and crowding in public spaces. The effort to keep Covid numbers low has to be a citizen movement. In countries like South Korea and Vietnam, this has worked—they haven't seen a second wave even though they have resumed economic activity. In Europe, responsible behaviour was not followed and it cost them.”

The UK recently announced its second national lockdown, beginning November 5. France too has reintroduced restrictions and curfews. In contrast, South Korea and Vietnam have not needed lockdowns at all. Their community-led efforts—mask discipline, limited public interactions and self-isolating when necessary—have allowed economic activities to continue even while simultaneously prioritising public health needs. If India is unable to do the same, a second lockdown might well be on the cards—with all the economic and social consequences that entails. ■

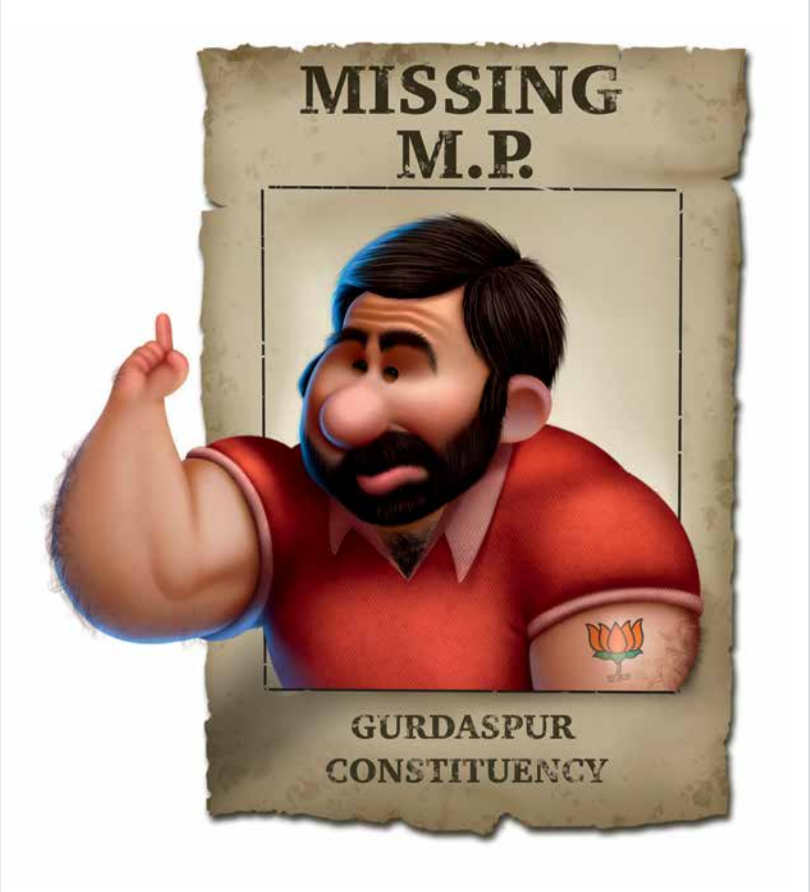


Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

Missing in Action

Mounting protests against the farm bills in Punjab have seen the state BJP unit under siege. Occasion for the party's only Jat-Sikh MP in the state Sunny Deol to step in, right? Not really. The Bollywood action star is missing from the list of speakers–Hardeep Singh Puri, Hans Raj Hans and Smriti Irani–the state unit has asked the Centre to dispatch to the state. Deol the politician is nothing like his fire-spitting image on screen. He has rarely spoken up in the 17 months that he has been MP, has been absent from his constituency Gurdaspur and has no rapport with either state or central leaders.

SKIMMED AID

Telangana chief minister **K. Chandrashekar Rao** has announced Rs 10,000 cash handouts to flood-affected families in Hyderabad. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) claims it has distributed it to 380,000 families so far. With GHMC polls due in early 2021, there's a sense of urgency to the effort. Except that the move could backfire on the government. Angry victims have been protesting outside government offices accusing corporators of skimming between Rs 2,000 and Rs 5,000 off their compensation.

ANI

Lions' Share

After Lucknow and Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh is all set to get a third zoo in Chief Minister **Yogi Adityanath**'s home district Gorakhpur in March. Occupying pride of place among the 200 animals and birds at the 121-acre zoo will be three lions relocated from another CM's pet project–Akhilesh Yadav's Etawah lion safari. The safari, finally inaugurated last year, had imported seven lions from Gujarat on September 26, 2019, of which one died. The remaining six will now be split between Etawah and Gorakhpur. Which three, a committee formed by the Chief Conservator of Wildlife in UP will decide.

ANINDYA SAHA

'HUE' & CRY

Trinamool Congress heavyweight **Suvendu Adhikari**'s defection to the BJP has been predicted for a long time now. Tongues started wagging again recently after his followers distributed saffron-coloured cards at a Bijaya Sammilani (post-Durga puja festivities) at Nandigram in East Midnapore. But then again, the pandal was in Mamata's favourite colours—white and blue—and the chairs in the party's colour, green.

–Sandeep Unnithan with Anilesh S. Mahajan, Amarnath K. Menon, Romita Datta and Ashish Misra

TRAIN PAIN Commuters at the Bhayander railway station in Mumbai

MILIND SHELTE

UNLOCK 5.0

GETTING MUMBAI TO MOVE AGAIN

By Kiran D. Tare

The crowds at bus stops in Mumbai and its suburbs are growing bigger by the day. Packed buses come and leave, with few able to get in. Frustration is building up, but commuters have little choice. As Mumbai tries to unlock its economy, and more and more offices open up and industries try to get back to business, the stab at normalcy still requires the restoration of a vital missing link—suburban, or 'local', commuter trains, the city's lifeline.

Since the Covid outbreak, local trains, which ferry an estimated 8 million commuters every day in normal times, have stopped running in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), except restricted operations for health and essential services workers, those in the pharma and food industries, and bankers and lawyers. An exception was also made for women commuters, for whom train services resumed on October 21 in two time slots—11 am to 3 pm and 7 pm to 12.40 am, the last train.

The Maharashtra government is keen on a full resumption of local train services and has been in talks—albeit unsuccessful so far—with the railways. On October 28, the state government requested the railways to open up the local train network for everyone in Mumbai, and suggested three time bands for travel: 4 am (the first local train) to 7.30 am, 11 am to 4 pm, and 8 pm to 12.40 am. The railways refused, citing the risk to passengers from the pandemic. It wants the government to take responsibility for managing the crowds at railway stations; the state says that's the railways' job.

Before Covid struck, the suburban rail network used to run some 2,200 daily train services across MMR. While the official capacity of each train is 1,700 passengers, nearly double that number cram in during rush hour. On October 31, the Central Railway and Western Railway informed the government that their restricted local train operations were catering to only about 2.2 million people every day, because social distancing norms had

HOW THE CITY TRAVELS

8 MILLION
Local train commuters per day

4.5 MILLION
Local bus commuters per day

4 MILLION
People travel for work in south Mumbai

₹500
Average monthly expense of second-class travel on local trains

₹2,000
Average monthly expense of travel on Mumbai Metro

drastically reduced passenger capacity to 700 per train. Beginning November 1, the railways introduced 610 local train services, upping the total daily runs to over 2,000.

Maharashtra officials are hopeful of a breakthrough when they hold a meeting with the railways in the second week of November. "This is not the time to score political points," says Vijay Wadettiwar, Maharashtra minister for relief and rehabilitation, accusing Union railways minister Piyush Goyal of not taking a "positive call" on the state's demand to open up local trains for all. "The trains run as per his (Goyal's) wish. It is when he deems it appropriate that local trains will run for commoners," says Wadettiwar.

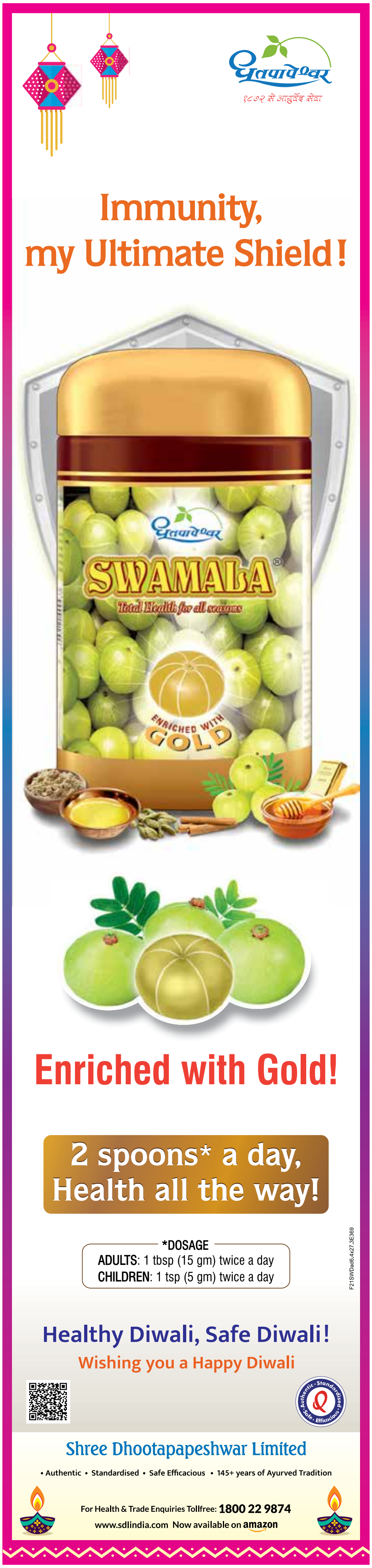
Under pressure to alleviate commuter woes while still ensuring that the new travel arrangements are Covid-safe, the state government is considering staggered working hours in the MMR. This is based on the recommendations of transport experts and commuter associations. Wadettiwar's department is considering various options, such as allowing private companies to decide their own shifts and determining office hours based on the nature of work and the particular requirements of various industries.

Most private and government offices in the MMR have 9-to-5 timings, which puts great pressure on the city's public transport system between 8 and 10 in the morning and 6 to 8 in the evening. Officials believe crowding on public transport can be significantly reduced, or at least managed, by changing office timings to 11 am-7 pm and 2 pm-10 pm. "Offices not into public dealings can go for staggered working hours," says a relief and rehabilitation department official.

Shift-based operations in government and private offices in Mumbai were first proposed in 2015 by then Union railway minister Suresh Prabhu to the Devendra Fadnavis government. However, the state government shot down the idea as 'impractical'.

While Lata Argade, secretary of the Suburban Railway Passenger Association, says that a change in office hours will drastically reduce overcrowding in suburban trains, transport expert Ashok Datar feels staggered office hours are a good option provided government offices, which have fixed working hours, take the lead in adopting it. "Local trains are more popular than Metro rail and buses, but [given the pandemic situation] access should not be unconditional," says Datar.

The railways have floated colour-coded QR (quick response)-based ticketing for commuters, under which they can board trains only in designated time slots during the day. This is expected to prevent overcrowding in trains. But a system like this can be effective only when office timings are staggered—and the state government might have to take the lead in setting that trend and making it happen. ■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QUID PRO QUO
GJM leader Bimal Gurung with West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee

WEST BENGAL

FRIENDS IN NEED

By Romita Datta

On October 21, Bimal Gurung, leader of a Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) faction and a fugitive from the law in West Bengal, made his first public appearance in three years. Despite the many charges filed against him—including under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act)—he held a press conference in Kolkata that day, announcing that he was ending his alliance with the BJP-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) and that he would help the TMC's (Trinamool Congress') Mamata Banerjee become "chief minister for the third time in 2021". He added that the BJP "has done nothing about our demand for a [separate] Gorkhaland", and that "Mamata Banerjee does what she says, so I'll help her win seats in the Darjeeling region". As a major political force in West Bengal's hill regions—Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the subdivisions of Kurseong, Mirik and Siliguri—Gurung's support will be crucial for the TMC in the upcoming assembly election, which is likely why he roams free despite the many cases against him.

This is not the first time that Mamata has sought an alliance with Gurung. In 2011, after coming to power, she had convinced him to give up his agitation for a separate Gorkhaland by forming an autonomous governing body for the region—the Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA)—and installing him as its chief executive. While this arrangement kept the peace for several years, Gurung resigned from the GTA and went into hiding in 2017, after fierce violence rocked the region that year. While there were several factors at play, ties between Gurung and the TMC had already been straining by then—in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the GJM helped the BJP's S.S. Ahluwalia defeat the TMC's Bhaichung Bhutia in Darjeeling.

The central issue was the persistent demand for a separate Gorkhaland. Political watchers say that with the TMC unwilling to give in to this demand, Gurung's support for the BJP came from his fond hope that the Union government might do what the state government would not. Another factor was local politics. Aware that Gurung's political strength came from the unity of the Gorkha sub-tribes on this issue, Mamata had attempted to splinter Gorkha unity by setting up individual development boards for sub-tribes—such as the Lepcha, Limbu and Tamang Development Boards.

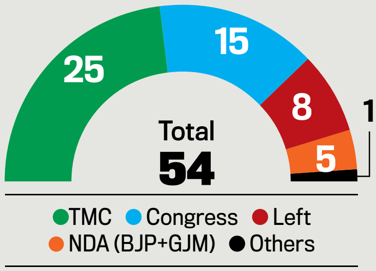
In May 2017, matters boiled over when the state government made Bangla a compulsory second language in government schools across West Bengal. The GJM organised a series of protest marches in the Darjeeling region, timed to coincide with a visit by the chief minister to the area in early June. Though a cabinet meeting at Darjeeling's Raj Bhavan on June 8 led to a clarification that Bangla would be an optional subject, protests intensified into violence and the paramilitary forces had to be called in to restore order. Violence intensified in the following weeks, leading to a complete shutdown in the region for over 100 days, culminating in two bomb blasts over August 19-20. This led to charges being filed against GJM leaders, including Gurung, under the UAPA. As a result, Gurung went underground.

Following this, Mamata attempted to separate Gurung from the GJM, supporting a faction of the group led by Binay Tamang and Anit Thapa. However, popular support remained with Gurung. This was visible in the fact that in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Raju Bista, a Gurung-nominated candidate fielded by the BJP, won the Darjeeling seat by a margin of about 400,000 votes. Later that year, another Gurung loyalist, Neeraj Zimba, defeated Tamang in a bypoll for the Darjeeling seat in the state assembly by around 46,000 votes. This, and the fact that the TMC had lost all eight Lok Sabha seats in North Bengal in the 2019 general election, likely made it clear to Mamata that the she needed Gurung on her side.

The unofficial agreement between Mamata and Gurung is a clear trade-off, sources say, granting Gurung sanctuary in his hometown in lieu of his support to Mamata in the Darjeeling hills and surrounding areas. With this deal, the TMC hopes to secure its chances of winning 15 assembly seats in these areas, where it is currently at a disadvantage following the BJP's remarkable performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, when it won seven of the eight seats in North Bengal. The TMC's weakness in this area was on display even in the 2016 assembly election, when it won only 25 of the 54 seats in north Bengal—the GJM and the BJP together won five, while 23 went to the Left-Congress combine.

THE GURUNG FACTOR

North Bengal 2016
assembly election results



Even though the NDA (BJP+GJM) won only five of north Bengal's 54 assembly seats in 2016, the GJM can potentially influence results in 15 constituencies, more than a quarter of the total, mainly in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar

Graphic by ASIT ROY

THE QUID PRO QUO DEAL WITH BIMAL GURUNG WILL SHORE UP THE PROSPECTS OF MAMATA BANERJEE'S TMC IN NORTH BENGAL FOR ASSEMBLY 2021

However, hurdles still remain for the TMC. The GJM faction led by Tamang has opposed the deal between Mamata and Gurung, with supporters arguing that Gurung's return will lead to fresh unrest in the Darjeeling hills. Some even say that this will end up benefiting the BJP by splitting the GJM and its votebank.

To forestall that possibility, Mamata met with Tamang on November 3, urging him to work with Gurung. However, this appears to be the beginning of a long and difficult road—at the meeting, Tamang reportedly made it clear that he and his faction of the GJM would have no truck with Gurung. After the half an hour meeting with Mamata, Tamang held a press conference at Gorkha Bhawan to announce this decision. "Who is Bimal Gurung?" he asked. "That chapter is closed. We will not share any administrative or political power with Gurung. We are on the field and with the people." The same day, the Darjeeling hills region also witnessed a series of rallies, one led by Tamang's faction of the GJM in Kalimpong and Kurseong and another by Gurung's faction in Mirik. Tamang claimed that the rally was an outpouring of the people's anguish and resentment at Gurung's return to the mainstream.

Sources in the TMC say Gurung had been sending feelers to the TMC for over a year to secure a deal that would allow him to end his exile. An understanding was possibly reached in mid-October, when TMC heir apparent Abhishek Banerjee and poll strategist Prashant Kishor visited North Bengal. Neither Gurung nor Tamang could be reached for comment, though Gurung's representative, Darjeeling MP Raju Bista, clarified that matters were not quite cut and dried, saying, "Elections are a long way away, and we will witness many other political developments [by then]. [But] the safe return of Gurung*ji* vindicates the BJP's stand that the TMC was using police and administrative machinery to browbeat its opponents into submission." While Mamata's deal with Gurung may have given her an edge over the BJP in the assembly election, it has also saddled her with an entirely new political problem. ■

DISINVESTMENT

THE INTERMINABLE LOOP

By M.G. Arun

The Centre's desperation for funds has never been more palpable. The clamour for a fiscal stimulus to revive the economy is only growing, and the government must also find the resources for substantial unbudgeted, yet unavoidable, expenditure on managing the Covid-19 pandemic. Strategic disinvestment in public sector enterprises, once again in the news, would have come to the rescue, but chances are the government will once again miss its overambitious Budget 2020-21 target of Rs 2.01 lakh crore.

On the evidence of what it actually managed to raise in the previous fiscal (Rs 50,300 crore) against a Budget FY20 target of Rs 1.05 lakh crore (later scaled back to Rs 65,000 crore), the new target appears a pie in the sky. It was even panned by analysts as mere grandstanding, even more so because the market outlook on PSU stocks was far from bullish, and just did not support that kind of optimism. So, it looks unlikely the government will make a good fist of the Rs 2.01 lakh crore targeted disinvestments during FY21. It is also making its desperation all too plain by shifting deadlines for 'expression of interest' and tweaking criteria to interest potential private investors.

Take the case of Air India. The Centre had constituted a five-member ministerial panel, headed by the then finance minister Arun Jaitley, way back in 2017 to finalise the privatisation of the airline. A few investors did show interest, but baulked at the terms. The biggest stumbling block for potential investors was the airline's gargantuan debt. As of March 31, 2019, Air India had a total debt of Rs 58,283 crore. Servicing that debt itself will entail an annual outgo of more than Rs 4,000 crore. The airline posted its highest-ever net loss of Rs 8,556 crore in 2018-19, compared with a net loss of Rs 5,348 crore in 2017-18.

The government has already postponed the deadline for bids several times. It missed the October 30 deadline too, but just a day before that deadline lapsed, the Centre made some critical changes in the bidding criteria, such as allowing prospective bidders the flexibility to decide the amount of debt they wish to take on, and mandating that the winning bidder must deposit at least 15 per cent of the bid amount in cash before the sale goes through. The Centre has also

GROUNDED
Air India's high debt puts off potential investors

INDRANIL MUKHERJEE/ AFP

re-extended the deadline for bids to December 14.

THE BIG GAP

₹2.01 LAKH CRORE
Centre's disinvestment target for **FY21**

……

₹5,700 CRORE
Revenues from disinvestment in the first half of **FY21**

……

₹14,700 CRORE
Shortfall (basis revised target) in disinvestment revenues in **FY20**

……

₹12 lakh CRORE
The Centre's projected market borrowing this fiscal to meet its revenue shortfall

AIR POCKET

₹8,556 CRORE
Air India's losses in **2018-19**

……

₹58,283 CRORE
Air India's debt, as on **March 31, 2019**

Air India is not the only public sector undertaking the government is struggling to offload; it also wants to get out of Life Insurance Corporation of India, Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL), Container Corporation of India and Shipping Corporation of India. Recently, the government extended the disinvestment deadline for BPCL too—for a fourth time—to November 16. The result of such postponements has been telling. In September, the Centre said it had managed to raise only Rs 5,700 crore out of the disinvestment target of Rs 2.01 lakh crore for FY21. With lower revenues and higher expenditure, the fiscal deficit in the April to August period this year had already touched 109 per cent of the full-year target—while revenue receipts stood at only 18 per cent of the target for the full year. This has forced the Centre to borrow a hefty Rs 12 lakh crore from the market this fiscal, way above its originally planned Rs 7.8 lakh crore. The October GST revenues will give it some hope: at Rs 1.05 lakh crore, collections were at an eight-month high, but whether the uptrend sustains remains to be seen.

"What remains for sale among PSU units are the tough ones," says D.K. Joshi, chief economist with Crisil. "The target is hefty. It is likely that the sales will get postponed." It has perplexed some analysts that the government is unable to get going with the proposed divestments even though the stock markets are still buoyant. "This (stocks rising) should have ideally helped listed companies that are up for disinvestment, but it hasn't," Joshi adds.

For the period 2019-20, the Centre had missed the revised divestment target (of Rs 65,000 crore) by Rs 14,700 crore. Disinvestment targets set by the central government have fallen short of the target in the past six years, except in 2017-18. Disinvestment of public sector units can happen in several ways, including strategic sale, initial public offering, offer for sale, exchange traded fund, buyback and so on.

According to the Public Enterprises Survey 2018-19, there were 249 operational central public sector firms as on March 31, 2019 . Of these, ONGC, Indian Oil Corporation and NTPC were the top three profitable PSUs in 2018-19, whereas BSNL, Air India and MTNL incurred the highest losses for a third consecutive year. The top 10 loss-making companies accounted for as much as 94 per cent of the total losses made by all the 70 loss-making central public sector firms during the year. While the government has repeatedly stated that it wants to get out of public sector units, it is unable to make a pitch for them that private players find tempting enough. ■

MADHYA PRADESH BYPOLLS

KAMAL NATH PLAYS HIS HAND

By Rahul Noronha

RAHUL NORONHA

In the days preceding the November 3 bypolls, 73-year-old Kamal Nath—whose government was brought down in March this year by Congress rebels led by Jyotiraditya Scindia—had settled on a new routine. Nearly every morning, Nath, never known to possess a special appetite for public meetings, would set out in his chopper to do just that—hit the ground and meet people in 2-3 constituencies every day. With Chhindwara MP and son Nakul as wingman, Nath clocked many hours on the campaign trail in the small towns and villages of MP. These byelections have been different, for it is after a long time that the Congress is not hamstrung by factional pulls and pressures, something the party's MP unit has been (in)famous for.

After Scindia parted ways in March, there has been no opposition to Nath in the party. With ex-CM Digvijaya Singh and Nath on the same page on most issues, Nath, as PCC president and leader of the Opposition, has complete control over party matters now. And it shows. Ticket distribution, media and general campaign strategy were all planned by him. He says planning for the campaign started eight months ago, soon after the government fell. "The people are unhappy with defectors, they will not accept this," says Nath.

While addressing public meetings, *gaddari* (betrayal) was the dominant theme, followed by the catchy *bikau/ tikau* (buyable/ stable) binary, a reference to the rebels who could be 'bought' as opposed to his own government, which might have steadily delivered the goods but for the defections. Only after this point had been made to his satisfaction did Nath move on to critiquing the present government's failures or to more local issues and the Congress candidate for the particular seat of interest to the present gathering. Nakul Nath, too, addressed the meetings often, part of the move to counter the BJP's charge of an ageing Congress leadership. Nath assigned worked to almost every state Congress leader of any standing in the constituencies going to the polls, so that party workers from all over got involved and felt they had a stake in the byelections.

Back at the camp office in the constituencies, Nath goes into a huddle with party leaders and seeks feedback on other Congress leaders assigned to the constituency. He may spend fewer hours in the field than his political adversaries, but Nath's planning and meticulous detailing offset that lack to a large extent. A sheaf of papers has the constituency details and hand-written cards have pointers to the issues that are to be highlighted at the rallies. His questions to party leaders working on the ground are usually about constituency-specific caste arithmetic, local issues, bringing in leaders who can pull votes and keeping away those who can cost the party votes.

If *gaddari* is a state-level issue and finds resonance in all 25 constituencies (perhaps a little more in the 16 seats in the Gwalior-Chambal region), local issues too are making these byelections difficult to call.

In Satkunda village in Sanchi segment, Gopilal, who handled former Congress MLA Prabhuram Chaudhry's campaign, now finds himself doing the same for him, but as a BJP agent. In the process, the local BJP cadre are miffed. "We worked for the party the last time, but this time we were not even asked by the BJP candidate," says Premnarayan of the same village. In the 2018 assembly election, the BJP candidate secured 550 votes out of the

ALL ABOUT THE PLAN
Kamal Nath addresses a poll gathering in Gairatganj, Sanchi, Oct. 29

600 polled. This time, however, the village is non-committal, mainly because a local rival who was with the Congress is now with the BJP. Many might still vote for the BJP but others are not so sure, given the local realignments.

Similar situations exist across the region with political lines now blurred, making it difficult for candidates to credibly assert where they stand. "I voted for Modi in the Lok Sabha election but I don't appreciate the way the Congress government was brought down. They should have been given five years," says Dinesh Sharma, a resident of Gairatganj.

In Surkhi, one of the seats where the Congress has fielded rebel BJP leaders—an ironic twist on its own pitch about turncoats—the party looks to other issues. "This election is not about the Congress or the BJP but about the future of democracy. If those who sell themselves win, then you can forget about even panchayat elections being fair," says Nath in Surkhi. He presents himself as a victim of a political conspiracy. "What was my fault that my government was pulled down?" he asks. Nath speaks of local Congress candidate Parul Sahu, who was a BJP MLA earlier, as someone who has the "DNA to serve". He also makes a distinction between Sahu and other turncoats, saying that Sahu's father was a Congress MLA, so it is a homecoming of sorts for her.

Nath affects optimism, but he knows the odds are stacked against him. The BJP needs to win just eight of the 28 seats in the fray to remain in power; the Congress needs to win all 28. Ask him what happens if the Congress wins a majority of the seats but falls short of the 28 required to form the government and he answers, "The seven Independents, BSP and SP MLAs will come back to the Congress if I ask them to." Nath looks confident but he disregards the fact that a BJP government in the state and at the Centre may compel them to go with the latter. What about the famed BJP organisation he has tried to match, the one that ensures a high BJP voter turnout every time? "When the people are angry, no organisation can save the guilty," says Nath.

There is another malaise the Congress is battling—an inability to keep its MLAs together. The party claims it is returning to power and that the turncoats are losing. This, however, did not prevent their MLA from Damoh, Rahul Lodhi, from quitting the party to join the BJP. There is speculation that the BJP has more such Congress MLAs on standby to resign if needed (further resignations would reduce the halfway mark for the BJP). It seems despite everything, Nath has failed to stem the tide.

A bright spark is the Congress's IT cell, which has been in the news for getting more views than its BJP counterpart. "Elections even two years ago were very different from what they are today. Everyone is armed with a smart phone and is seeing things," says Nath, hinting that the party's IT wing got a major facelift before the byelections.

What if the Congress does reasonably well but falls short of the majority? Is it goodbye to politics for Nath? "I'm not going anywhere. I am in it for the long haul," he says. November 10 will prove the worth of his words. ■

Will the lower turnout yield 'surprise results'?

The byelections for the 28 seats in MP recorded an average polling percentage of 70 per cent, about 3.5 percentage points lower than that recorded in the same seats in the 2018 assembly election. Of the 28 seats, only seven–Bhander, Karera, Pohri, Ashok Nagar, Biaora, Agar and Suwasara–recorded a polling percentage higher than in 2018. The lower turnout has been attributed to Covid and to the ongoing kharif harvesting (which is still not complete in many areas) while rabi sowing has also begun.

It remains to be seen which political party gains or loses as a result of the lower turnout. Reacting to the turnout, Kamal Nath claimed the results on November 10 will "surprise everyone".

BOOKS

A HISTORY OF OPPOSITION

By Dilip Menon

Romila Thapar has been our mentor and guide over a period of half a century in understanding the Indian past in all its complexity. She has engaged with the presence of diversity, conflict, dissonance and debate in the making of what we see as the past of India. The one idea carved with great clarity from her reading of the archives of the pasts is that to invent an idea of Indian civilisation as a monolith would be both false and debilitating to the project of creating and maintaining a civil society governed by ideas of compassion and the ethic of dissent. This new essay puts dissent at the heart of the formation of India as an idea and as a political entity.

In the 1940s, Romila Thapar as a young child meets the Mahatma. Gandhi asks her why she wears mill-made cloth rather than khadi. A simple and direct question taken on the face of it. However, the symbol of khadi combines within it an idea of indigeneity, of patient withdrawal into thought and a stern ethics of making centred on the well-being of the many. Sixty years later, she visits the women protesting peacefully at Shaheen Bagh against the Citizenship Amendment Act and has another moment of epiphany. She meets women of all classes invested in an idea of belonging for all and willing to engage in dissent in a patient and deliberative manner. These two moments are at the heart of the book, putting the idea of dissent at the heart of an ethical democracy.

DISSENT
ROMILA THAPAR | Voices of Dissent
AN ESSAY

VOICES OF DISSENT
An Essay
by Romila Thapar
SEAGULL BOOKS
₹499; 164 pages

Historically, what we have is a constantly shifting landscape of contention between orthodoxy and emerging thought

What Thapar argues for in this lucid and reasoned essay is the long genealogy of dissent in India. While there was always an internal coherence within texts that created a hermetic world of unanimity, they were produced within and reacted to a field within which multiple strands of opinion flourished. As she puts it, the idea of a Self and its Other would make sense only within a particular conjuncture. Historically, what we have is a constantly shifting landscape of contention between orthodoxies and emergent forms of practice and thought. During the Vedic period, there is the figure of the *dasaputra brahmana*, a *brahman* born of a *dasi* or low-born woman and a Brahmin father. An orthodoxy here engages with human frailty and its consequences, and instead of the fault line of purity, what we have is an openness to intellect, however infrequent.

Then there is the opposition between the *brahmana* and the *sramana*; the latter being a disparate and expanding group of dissenters from the orthodoxy that while capable of defining them is, in turn, shaped by them. Thus, we have those who live on the margins of society, those who depart from the orthodoxy and create powerful counter-dispositions like Buddhism, and those whose rational beliefs make them sceptical of social hierarchy and the arbitrary differentiation of humans. We have to engage with multiplicity if we are not to relapse into a polemical understanding that, ironically, rests on the understanding of the world created by dominant orthodox thought.

These multiple streams of thought and practice then feed into the growth of the Bhakti and Sufi movements and multiple dissenting sects that try and imagine the world anew. A world free of hierarchy, constantly open to change, and where thought can melt the violence of a society frozen by habit. Dissent, expressed against the state as much as institutional forms of religion, creates traditions of thinking that are always available as a resource. Hence, when Gandhi thinking against colonial violence thinks through the idea of *satyagraha*, he draws upon a library of dissent with its vocabulary and forms. As for instance, the idea of *dharna* present in Gujarat which is about moral persuasion towards doing the right thing. Thapar does not make an argument for passive inheritance. At each historical juncture, the reimagining of an ethical conception of equality and compassion draws upon a rich vein of dissentient thought.

Democracy survives because of dissent. Forms of political and social orthodoxy are contingent; and the battle against them is always ongoing. ■

Dilip Menon *is Mellon Chair in Indian Studies, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa*

TILAK DEVASHER

GUEST COLUMN

A Provisional Conflict

On November 1, Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan, while in Gilgit amid an election campaign there, announced: "Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) will be given provisional provincial status." Khan, though, did not indicate any time-frame. It was in September that his government's minister for Kashmir affairs and GB, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, had given indications of such a move. Yet, in an interview to an Indian platform in October, Moeed W. Yusuf, special assistant to the Pakistan PM on national security, had stated categorically that no such decision was being considered.

For over 70 years, Pakistan had kept GB out of its constitutional jurisdiction to ensure that its people voted in favour of Pakistan whenever a plebiscite mandated by the UN is held. Why then is Islamabad contemplating changing the status quo of GB and making it a provisional province now?

Several factors have possibly dictated the timing. China has been coaxing Pakistan to fully incorporate GB as a province in order to secure its $60 billion (around Rs 4.48 lakh crore) investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through the region. Pakistan is not in a position to resist such pressure. For one thing, it will be seeking a rollover of a $3 billion (around Rs 22,400 crore) Chinese trade finance facility that it has actually used to repay maturing debt. If China does not extend the facility when it expires, Pakistan may find it extremely difficult to return the sum, especially when its other benefactors, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are estranged.

The timing could also be dictated by the need to demonstrate to India an effective response to the events of August 5, 2019, when Jammu and Kashmir's special status was withdrawn. It could also be aimed at influencing the elections to the GB legislative assembly scheduled for November 15. Finally, it could be a tactic to divert attention from Pakistan's burgeoning domestic problems.

There are, however, several aspects to changing the status of GB. It will require delinking the region from the J&K issue—this will violate UN resolutions on J&K. So, Pakistan could well end up jeopardising its position on J&K. There are also several pronouncements of the superior judiciary that GB is a part of J&K; these will stand violated if Pakistan makes GB its fifth province, even provisionally. Pakistan is trying to deflect such impediments by calling the decision a provisional arrangement, pending a final resolution of the J&K issue.

The decision is unlikely to be acceptable to the so-called Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) region since GB is considered to be a part of it. As it is, protests broke out in early October in Muzaffarabad, the capital of AJK, against any such decision. The president of AJK, too, has gone on record opposing it.

The decision could be timed to influence polls in Gilgit-Baltistan or divert attention from Pakistan's domestic problems

Several constitutional amendments, requiring two-thirds majority in both houses of Pakistan's parliament, will be needed to effect the change. It will require the support of the opposition given how the numbers stack up in parliament. The opposition, which has held a series of protests to remove Khan's government, may not extend such cooperation.

To smoothen the process, Pakistan's army chief had to intervene since Khan, out of arrogance, refuses to engage with the opposition. In mid-September, the army chief held a meeting with leaders of political parties to build consensus on granting provisional provincial status to GB. Opposition leaders say it was decided in the meeting that the consultations will proceed after the November 15 election. Khan's 'premature' announcement could well be construed as a contravention of the consensus forged by the army chief.

Any move to incorporate Indian territory into Pakistan—even provisionally—clearly impacts India's territorial integrity and goes against the unanimous parliamentary resolution of 1994 that the entire J&K region is an integral part of India. Not surprisingly, India has officially conveyed to Pakistan that the entire Union territory of J&K and Ladakh, including the areas of GB, are its integral part and attempts to bring material changes in these areas stand completely rejected. New Delhi asked Islamabad to immediately vacate all areas under its illegal occupation. Khan's decision to give GB provisional provincial status could be as challenging to implement as it has been easy to announce. ■

Tilak Devasher *is member, National Security Advisory Board (NSAB). Views are personal*

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

ANI

THE DOUBLE ENGINE PM Modi and Nitish Kumar at an election rally in Samastipur, Nov. 1

ASSEMBLY POLL

BIHAR

DOWN TO THE WIRE

PM MODI AND THE BJP PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS AS TEJASHWI AND A RESURGENT RJD THREATEN A FIGHTBACK

By Amitabh Srivastava

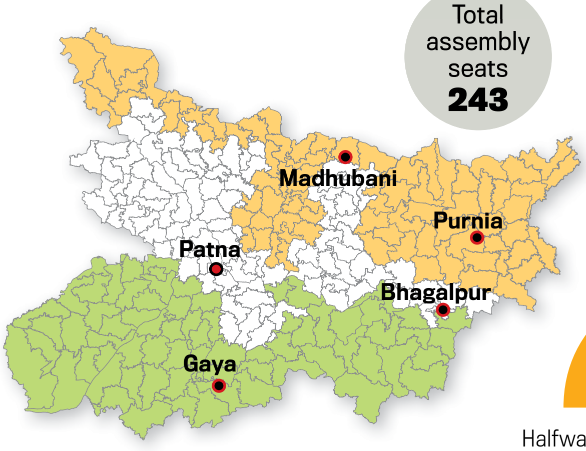
In all the election rallies Prime Minister Narendra Modi has addressed in Bihar, he has tried to hammer home three points—that an alliance government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Janata Dal (United) or JD(U) is the state's best bet for *vikaas* (development); that Nitish Kumar is the chief ministerial face of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA); and that the opposition spearhead and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Tejashwi Yadav is a dynast—"the *yuvraj* of jungle raj" as the prime minister calls him—who must be cast aside by the electorate.

Of late, though, PM Modi and Nitish have stepped up the attacks, a tacit acknowledgment that Lalu Prasad's son has come into his own and is the prime challenger to the throne in Bihar. There are perhaps some jitters as preliminary reports from the ground have not been very encouraging for the NDA on the 71 constituencies that went to the polls in the first phase on October 28. Analysts now feel the constant emphasis on the RJD's '15 years of misrule' is sending out the impression that the NDA is feeling the heat.

The BJP's Bihar strategy, however, is far more complex and multi-dimensional than the PM's pitch alone. The full cast of characters the party has fielded is itself

THREE PHASES FOR BIHAR

Total assembly seats **243**



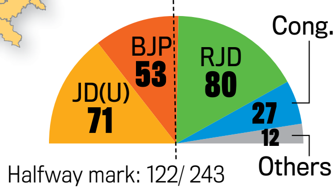
🟢 Oct. 28, 2020
71 constituencies

○ Nov. 3, 2020
94 constituencies

🟡 Nov. 7, 2020
78 constituencies

Result
Nov. 10, 2020

Current assembly position



Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

testimony to this. So one day there's Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath talking about the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and how abrogation of Article 370 has given Indians from other states "licence" to own property in Jammu and Kashmir, while on the next defence minister Rajnath Singh is seen pushing the China border narrative and how the Congress's past mistakes led us to this impasse. Meanwhile, BJP president J.P. Nadda picks on the "anarchist", "anti-national" elements in the opposition alliance while Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman goes to Patna to release the BJP poll manifesto, which promised to create 1.9 million jobs and free Covid vaccine for all in the poll-bound state. The Union MoS for finance Anurag Thakur was also in Patna, and at a press conference on October 27 invoked film villain Gabbar Singh to red-flag the risks of the RJD returning to power, no matter that he himself was pulled up by the Election Commission for egging the people on with slogans like *"Desh ke gaddaaron ko..."* (the follow-up to which was '*goli maaro saalon ko*' or 'shoot the traitors', which his followers lustily echoed) during the Delhi poll campaign.

But, as one senior JD(U) leader analysed, all these seemingly disparate campaign lines serve a common, well-worked purpose for the BJP—upsetting the opposition campaign and securing the party's committed vote bank. "Not even 1 per cent of Bihar's voters will want to own property in J&K. Similarly, people may not vote for the Congress but not because of their China policy," he said, speaking off the record. "What this sort of pitch does is get the fence-sitters, or those who are vacillating, back on our side. This narrative is required to remind them about their roots, what they stand for and which alliance fulfils their ideology," he says.

Off the record, BJP insiders admit a neck-and-neck contest—the RJD-Congress-Left alliance has the Muslim-Yadav consolidation solidly behind it and analysts say the Dalit votes of the CPI(M-L) will get transferred in toto whereas some division is being seen in the committed vote bank of the NDA. This division, going by some ground reports, is largely because rebel NDA ally Chirag Paswan of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) is fielding some former BJP men against JD(U) candidates and also the traction that Tejashwi's one million jobs promise seems to be getting.

Late in the day, the BJP also seems to have realised that Chirag undercutting the JD(U) may end up hurting the NDA. The triangular contests in a number of seats suit the RJD, and Modi's effort now is to retain the committed vote bank of the NDA. Still, even now the PM refuses to directly target Chirag. BJP sources say there are two reasons for this: the 4.5 per cent Paswan votes associated with the LJP and a post-poll Plan B—if Chirag does manage to sweep up enough seats, dragging the JD(U) down, the NDA government in the state could see some partner swaps.

The BJP's Bihar strategy is far more complex and multi-dimensional than Prime Minister Modi's campaign pitch

But, as things stand, PM Modi looks committed to the three NDA partners in Bihar. He has been taking their names—the JD(U), Hindustani Awam Morcha-Secular (HAM-S) and the Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP)—at rallies and cautioning people against those trying to "mislead the electorate".

Why Bihar matters

While the Bihar election is make-or-break for Nitish, it is no less significant for Prime Minister Modi. Not much has gone the BJP way in the state assembly elections after its massive Lok Sabha sweep in 2019. A victory in Bihar can put a spring back into the saffron step before the crucial West Bengal election next year.

The Bihar election also assumes crucial significance as it is being held amid the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic and a sagging economy. An NDA win could be seen as an endorsement of the central government's policies and programmes. At stake is also the BJP's hope to rule the state alone in the days to come (a wish the lower-rung state leadership had expressed in the run-up to this election too, saying the anti-incumbency against Nitish was only weighing the party down). From just 10.97 per cent of the vote in the 2005 assembly poll, the BJP had more than doubled its vote share to 24.42 per cent by 2015.

Photographs by ANI

BJP SUPPORT CAST
(Clockwise from top left) Nirmala Sitharaman with the party manifesto; Yogi at a rally in Patna; Anurag Thakur in Patna; J.P. Nadda in Hajipur and Rajnath Singh in Champaran

The Endgame

A CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) opinion poll last month gave 38 per cent of the vote to the NDA against 32 per cent for the grand alliance. But ground reports suggest a closer battle is at hand. The BJP has given 11 seats to Mukesh Sahani's VIP, which has a hold over the Mallah EBC (extremely backward classes) group. Sahani is yet to prove his electoral worth (the VIP lost all three Lok Sabha seats it contested in 2019 as an RJD ally), but the BJP's idea is to consolidate its social combination.

One factor that could help the NDA is the third alliance in the fray—the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul-Muslimeen (AIMIM), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP)—and the Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) of Pappu Yadav, which is again fighting separately. The BJP calculates that these parties will cut into the *mahagathbandhan* votes in Muslim as well as RJD strongholds.

The party is also hoping the "double engine theory" being promoted by the alliance partners—that a state government in tune with the Centre is better for Bihar's *vikaas*—and the BJP propaganda on the work the Modi government has done for the state will have an impact. As BJP chief Nadda puts it, "Development is our main plank. The Prime Minister Modi government has done many great things for Bihar in the past six years, but the state stands at a crucial crossroads now. Our poll plank is that a regime that is in tune with the central government will work wonders for Bihar."

To say that Bihar is a crucial election is to state the obvious. For the BJP, a good showing here will be a balm for the fall in Jharkhand and set the stage for the mega battle against Mamata Banerjee in Bengal. Extending the logic, the party may even think of becoming the "*bada bhai* (big brother)" to the JD(U) in a post-poll scenario, if it does end up as the single-largest party by some margin.

For Nitish, November 10 will decide whether his political career hits another high or not. For young Tejashwi, a win will bump him up several notches, scripting a bounceback for the beleaguered RJD. The BJP may not look like the top player among the three now, but it has made sure that on November 10, Team Saffron will be holding a few aces. ■

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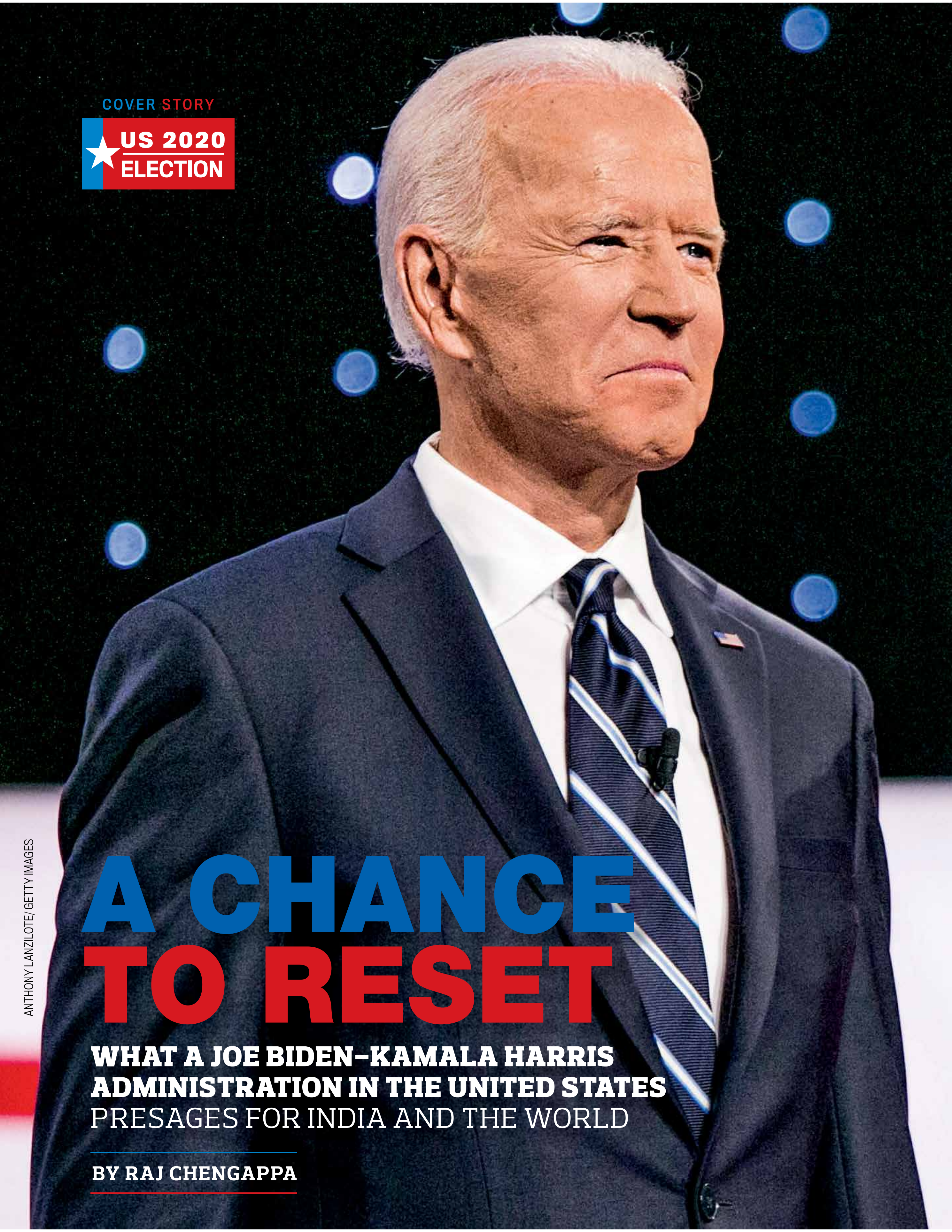


ANTHONY LANZILOTE/ GETTY IMAGES

COVER STORY

US 2020 ELECTION

A CHANCE TO RESET

WHAT A JOE BIDEN-KAMALA HARRIS ADMINISTRATION IN THE UNITED STATES PRESAGES FOR INDIA AND THE WORLD

BY RAJ CHENGAPPA

DREAM TEAM
Joe Biden and Kamala Harris during the Democratic presidential candidates' debate in Detroit, Michigan, July 2019

UMB
FOR
TRUM

WHEN JOSEPH ROBINETTE BIDEN JR is sworn in as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, 2021, he will be 78 years of age, already the oldest ever leader to hold that office. He will also have the distinction of winning the highest number of popular votes in the US presidential elections, ahead of even Barack Obama. Not bad for a former vice-president who was regarded as a has-been till he overtook the Democratic party's frontrunners in the primaries to win the nomination. He then went on to win the presidency, defeating incumbent Donald Trump who had scornfully dismissed him as 'Sleepy Joe'.

On the flip side, Biden will be leading a country that is deeply divided and polarised by the vote itself, and along more enduring fault-lines of race, class and geography. This at a time when the global Covid-19 pandemic has hit America the hardest with 9.5 million cases and 234,000 deaths as of November 5. It has already severely diminished the country's economy, rendering over 20 million people jobless—a catastrophe that invites comparison with the Great Depression. Worse, Trump's boast to 'Make America Great Again' has been reduced to 'America Alone'. He quarrelled with America's trusted allies, broke away from treaties and agreements, declined to be the global super-cop and conducted a disruptive, tweet-driven diplomacy that has considerably undermined the status and stature of the world's premier power. And all this while the coronavirus crisis has accelerated the process of de-globalisation the world over, increasing isolation and eroding individual liberties and freedoms.

So, Biden's task for the next four years is pretty much cut out. But is he up to it? And what does his presidency mean for India and the world?

SAVING HOME

The answers to these questions lie in the forces that propelled Biden to the presidency. Before the elections, America faced what experts called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: the pandemic and the physical toll it took on Americans, the steep economic downturn it caused, the deep racial divisions triggered by heavy-handed and often bigoted policing, and the growing sense of social injustice felt across

MANDEL NGAN / GETTY IMAGES

SURE FOOTING
US President Donald Trump at his campaign rally in Lumberton, North Carolina in October

> **SOUTH BLOCK WILL BE RELIEVED THAT IT WILL NO LONGER HAVE TO DEAL WITH TRUMP'S YO-YO DIPLOMACY. BIDEN WILL BE LESS VOLATILE AND MORE CONSISTENT**

the country. If Biden finally won the US election, it was not because people totally rejected Trump's policies, as the president did win a high percentage of the popular vote. The nation embraced Biden because he seemed to have a better plan to pull the nation out of its health and economic woes and was regarded as more of a unifying force than Trump to heal some of the deep wounds across the country.

Biden, despite his penchant for and expertise on foreign policy, is likely to spend most of his tenure focusing on solving critical domestic issues. How strong a president he will make may be determined by whether the Democrats can wrest control of the Senate from the Republicans and retain control of the House of Representatives. If the Republicans retain control of the Senate, it will considerably cramp Biden's style and speed of decision-making. That's because this important wing of the Congress confirms key appointments, including the president's cabinet secretaries and judges of the Supreme Court, apart from ratifying bills and approving treaties. Biden's advantage is that he has been senator for 36 years and has good rapport across the aisles as well as a reputation for securing bipartisan support on key issues.

Biden is also seen as more of a restorer than a reformer or transformer. Michael Krepon, co-founder of the Stimson Center, who had interacted with him when he held office, describes him as "a decent human being—more of a kind uncle rather than a bright shiny object. We know about him, what his limitations are and that he will try his best to do the job". A former Senate foreign relations committee chairman, Biden impressed most wonks with his prescience on key international issues confronting the US. As vice-president, he had pushed for a lighter footprint strategy in Afghanistan. Sameer Lalwani, Krepon's colleague at Stimson, says, "Those involved spoke highly of Biden's decision-making ability and strategic grasp of the big picture. They said it was not just instinctive but came from his deep study of a problem. His dispassionate assessment and his courage to pursue counter-conventional wisdom made him an effective leader."

Now, Biden will have to bring these skills to bear on the crucial domestic issues his country faces. On top of the list is containing the third wave of the pandemic. Unlike Trump,

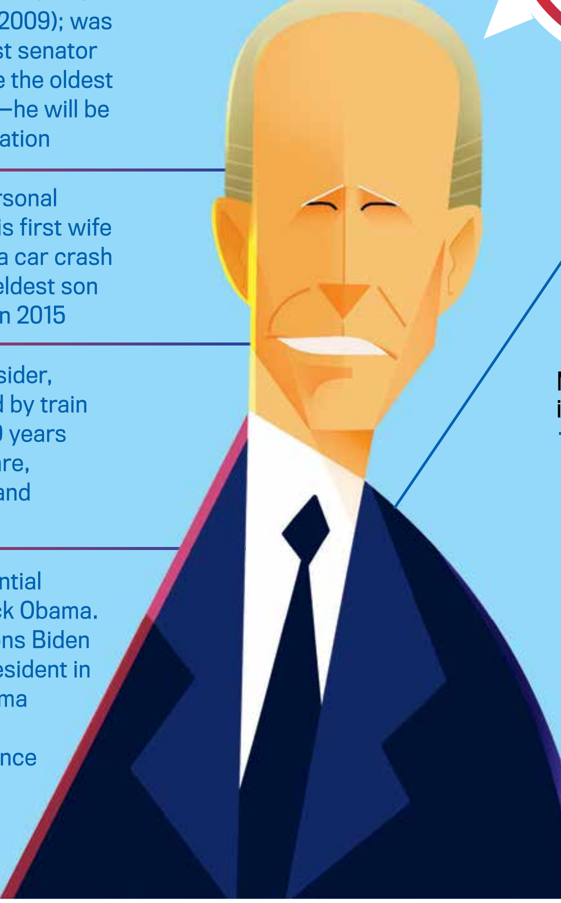
BIDEN'S LONG MARCH

Long-time US senator from Delaware (1973-2009); was the fifth youngest senator in history; will be the oldest sitting president—he will be 78 at his inauguration

Has endured personal tragedies; lost his first wife and daughter in a car crash in 1972; lost his eldest son to brain cancer in 2015

A Washington insider, Biden commuted by train for more than 30 years between Delaware, where he lived, and Washington D.C.

As V-P, an influential advisor to Barack Obama. One of the reasons Biden didn't run for president in 2016 is that Obama believed Hillary had a better chance to defeat the Republican nominee

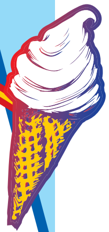


Ran for president in 1987 and 2008

Favourite movie: *Chariots of Fire*

Biden owns a 1967 Corvette Stingray

The Bidens earned $15.6 mn from book deals and speaking engagements since Joe's vice-presidency ended



He has a penchant for ice cream, on which his campaign spent more than $10,000 as of April 2020

Neilia Hunter

(Biden's first wife)

Married in 1966; died in a car crash in 1972

Hunter Biden

(Biden's only surviving child from first wife; was fingered for corruption by the Trump campaign over his role in a Ukrainian gas firm)

Jill Tracy Jacobs

(Current wife)

Married in 1977

Ashley Blazer Biden

(Daughter)

Executive director, Delaware Center for Justice; social worker

Illustrations by SIDDHANT JUMDE; *Graphics by* TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

Biden is a passionate advocate of wearing masks and social distancing measures. There are concerns, though, that he may resort to frequent lockdowns to curtail its spread and hurt the economy. To provide better health facilities, Biden is likely to restore the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, which Trump negated while failing to provide an alternative. Biden's plan is to give the elderly better healthcare at lower cost—a move that won him support across an ageing nation where a third of the population is above 60 years of age.

For the economy, Biden will focus heavily on improving the state of America's burgeoning middle class, which has emerged as the backbone of the country and is now considered his main support base. Unlike Trump, who favoured a fossil fuel-driven revival of the economy, Biden has boldly pushed for clean technology and promises an energy revolution that will create 10 million jobs, including a massive expansion in infrastructure. For boosting the manufacturing sector, the president-elect is championing a 'Buy American' programme (which sounds suspiciously like Trump's 'America First') that calls for $400 billion worth of government purchases of US manufactured goods and services and an additional $300 billion to fund new research and development in key technology areas.

THE RISE OF KAMALA HARRIS

Born to Indian and Jamaican immigrants in California in 1964, Harris grew up in Berkeley but visited her grandparents in Chennai; learnt to wear a sari and even speak some Tamil

Studied politics and economics at Howard University, a historically Black college, and attained a law degree after that

Was California's attorney general from 2011-2017

Became the first Indian American and second African American woman to join the Senate in 2017; will be the first woman to become US vice-president

Harris has advocated for DREAMers (undocumented immigrants who arrived in the US as children), equal pay and abortion rights; faced some pushback for her allegedly overzealous record as California's prosecutor

Wakes up at 6 am and works out for half an hour daily

She enjoys cooking; roast chicken is her go-to dinner

Collects Converse sneakers; they are her go-to travel shoes

Favourite books include *Native Son* by Richard Wright, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan, *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison

Her name's pronunciation became an election issue after a Republican Senator called her 'Ka- mala -mala -mala'

P.V. GOPALAN
(Maternal grandfather)

RAJAM GOPALAN
(Maternal grandmother)

DONALD J. HARRIS
(Father)

SHYAMALA GOPALAN
(Mother)

MAYA HARRIS
(Sister)

Married to Tony West. Meena Harris is her daughter

DOUGLAS EMHOFF
(Husband)

Douglas Emhoff was married for 25 years to film producer Kerstin Emhoff. They have two children–Cole Emhoff and Ella Emhoff

To fund his promised $700 billion expansion plans for the economy, Biden plans to raise taxes on the super-rich apart from corporate houses. To win over the big constituency of Left-leaning Democrats, Biden has also committed to double the federal minimum wage to $15 an hour. The Republican-controlled Senate refused to consider voting on such a bill passed by the House of Representatives last year, citing the higher costs it would impose on business. Biden also plans to strengthen labour-friendly laws. Both proposals are designed to attract the votes of the vast band of supporters of Bernie Sanders, a leader of the Democrats' far left, whom he defeated in the primaries.

RETURN OF THE GLOBAL BOSS

What is clear is that Biden's domestic economic plans will heavily influence his conduct of foreign policy. He is determined to undo the harm he believes Trump brought to America's international interests. On Biden's first day in office, he "will get on the phone to key allies and say that America is back and America has your back", Brian McKeon, his foreign policy advisor, told CNN in an interview in September. McKeon added that Trump "had poked his finger in the eye of all our friends and allies, and he has embraced every autocrat in the world...we have lost all our friends".

Ashley Tellis, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment

FROM MISTRUST TO A MUST-HAVE FRIEND

The Cold War, then the nuclear thaw, and now the strategic alliance—the highs and lows of the Indo-US relationship through the tenures of American presidents

HARRY S. TRUMAN
1945–1953

HIGH: Emergency wheat loans to India

LOW: Rankled by India's neutrality in Cold War

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
1953–1961

HIGH: Economic aid packages to India. US concludes India's neutrality not against its interests

LOW: Start of a military relationship with Pakistan

JOHN F. KENNEDY
1961–1963

HIGH: $1 bn aid for Third Plan. Steel plant in Bokaro, N-plant in Tarapur

LOW: Criticises India's annexation of Goa

LYNDON B. JOHNSON
1963–1969

HIGH: US assistance for Green Revolution

LOW: Embargo on military supplies during 1965 war

RICHARD NIXON
1969–1974

HIGH: Waives interest payments on $3 bn worth of rupee payments for food

LOW: Sends US navy into the Bay of Bengal

GERALD FORD
1974–1977

HIGH: Indo-US joint commission set up

LOW: Cancels India visit after Emergency

JIMMY CARTER
1977–1981

HIGH: US becomes India's largest trading partner

LOW: US ire over India's refusal to condemn Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

RONALD REAGAN
1981–1989

HIGH: Hosting PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi

LOW: $2.5 bn arms package to Pakistan

GEORGE H.W. BUSH
1989–1993

HIGH: Support to emergency IMF loans to India in 1991

LOW: US aircraft refuelling in India creates political storm

for International Affairs, agrees with this assessment and says that topping the list of Trump's liabilities is "the total repudiation of America's traditional role in global relations and a complete disinterest in protecting the global systems that the US had built from the end of the second world war". Next, Tellis cites the brusque and transactional manner in the way Trump treated America's close alliances and key friendships in Europe and East Asia. Likewise, Trump's failure to support international institutions that the US built to economise the use of hard power and enhance its global standing, most recently evidenced by walking out of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Unlike Trump, who believed in conducting diplomacy over tweets and shifted his stand rapidly on issues, Biden is expected to be less volatile and more consistent in his foreign policy. Shivshankar Menon, who was the national security advisor in the Manmohan Singh government, recalls that Biden, as vice president, pushed hard to persuade Obama to follow through on the Indo-US nuclear deal. Menon believes that Biden is a process-driven leader who will hire top professionals or competent political representatives to man his administration and rely on them for advice. This is in

BILL CLINTON
1993–2001

HIGH: State visit, vision statement underlining India's rising economic potential

LOW: Sanctions against India for 1998 Pokhran tests

BARACK OBAMA
2009–2017

HIGH: Recognition of India as a major defence partner on par with closest allies

LOW: Failure to get India into NSG

GEORGE W. BUSH
2001–2009

HIGH: Indo-US nuclear deal bringing India out of global nuclear isolation. Transformation of Indo-US military relationship

LOW: Military aid to Pakistan for war on terror

DONALD TRUMP
2017–2021

HIGH: Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership with India; three key foundational deals signed. Support during border row with China

LOW: Took India off the Generalized System of Preferences, which had allowed Indian exporters tariff-free access to US markets

> **INDO-US TIES HAVE SEEN AN UPWARD TREND OVER THE TERMS OF THE PAST FOUR PRESIDENTS, REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRAT. BIDEN NOW NEEDS TO BUILD ON THE STRONG FOUNDATION ALREADY IN PLACE**

contrast to Trump of whom he says: "There is really no Trump administration below Trump." Navtej Sarna, a former Indian ambassador to the US who dealt with the Trump administration, agrees with Menon. "I used to walk down ghost corridors in key government departments where there was nobody in the rooms for months," he recalls. "With Biden, we will have less unpredictability and more people to talk to."

Biden's commitment to put America back at the head of the table on key global issues will be welcomed not just by India but by much of the world. Especially his statement that he will reverse Trump's decision to walk out of the Paris Climate Change Agreement which Barack Obama had signed in 2015 when Biden was his vice-president. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, had backed the agreement and India was dismayed when Trump reneged on the commitments the US had made to cut its emissions, provide funds to needy countries and share clean technology. Biden has also signalled that he will get the US to renegotiate the deal to get Iran to give up its nuclear weapons plan, which Trump had broken away from. Trump had imposed economic sanctions on any country that was purchasing oil from Iran, including India. On Afghanistan, though, Biden is on the same page as Trump and will want to pull back American troops.

What India will watch with particular interest is how Biden deals with an aggressive China. Trump followed a haphazard policy on China, focusing largely on reducing the unfavourable trade balance between them. But he was blunt enough to call out China as a political rival and competitor and aggressively took it on for its expansionist policy in the final months of his presidency. China, meanwhile, exposed itself with its lack of transparency and manipulation of facts on the Covid pandemic, its aggressive, arrogant and expansionist behaviour not just with India but with others across the South China Sea, and its wolf warrior diplomacy that used social media as a stealth weapon against its opponents. The Trump administration offered all support to India in dealing with Chinese aggression on the Line of Actual Control. Biden has made it clear that he is against an expansionist China and has even described Xi Jinping as "a thug", saying "he doesn't have a 'democratic with a small d' bone in his body". Biden, therefore, is likely to continue to extend support to India in its standoff against China.

However, the new president will have to engage with China when America rejoins the Paris Climate Change Agree-

WILL BIDEN PROVE BETTER FOR IN

Experts predict continuity in strategic cooperation but also no let-up in the US hard line on trade issues, albeit without the volatility of the Trump administration

‘NO FREE PASSES’

ASHLEY J. TELLIS

Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC

Biden will be in the mould of a traditional US president. Externally, there will be a recommitment to US leadership, reinvestment in our alliances and re-engagement with multilateral institutions. The US-India relationship is at a good place and the Biden administration will want to protect and build on what Trump left behind. However, Biden won't give India a pass on three issues: 1) Liberalism and the changing character of Indian democracy; 2) What India's self-reliance push means for their trade ties; 3) The US's attitude towards countries like China and Pakistan. With Pakistan, I see greater continuity and not a fall back to the old US policy since its utility to the US is minimal as compared to the past.

‘RELIEF IN SOUTH BLOCK’

TANVI MADAN

Senior Fellow; Director, the India Project, Brookings Institution, Washington DC

With Biden taking over, South Block will heave a sigh of relief over the lack of volatility and ups and downs. Unlike Trump, whom India had to scramble to understand, Biden is not an unknown. India knows him well and Biden knows India well too. He believes in working with allies and taking them along. On China, he favours a collective approach of nations so that they can combine and put pressure together. He is going to make the US rejoin the Paris Climate Change Agreement. He has said they are not going to walk out of WHO and they will put more effort to be present in other international institutions. All things India would like. The big unknown is the economic side and what the new president's approach is going to be.

‘THE US WANTS INDIA IN ITS CAMP’

APARNA PANDE

Research Fellow and Director, Initiative on the Future of India and South Asia, Hudson Institute

There will be a continuity in Indo-US relations, which, over the past two decades, have seen a marked upswing. On the strategic front, I don't see changes. The China factor looms over the globe and if the US is looking for a country to be in its camp, then India is and will remain at the heart of its national security strategy. But on the economic side, concerns like India not lowering trade tariffs and opening up its economy and being protectionist, will remain. Also, being a Democratic administration, will it ask India to do more on human rights, religious freedom and living up to its own ideals and constitutions? Yes. But will it be the only issue that will determine how it will work with India? No.

‘INDIA HAS A SECURITY BLANKET-CHINA’

MICHAEL KREPON

Co-founder and Distinguished Fellow, Stimson Center, Washington DC

Joe Biden is a kind uncle and not a great shiny object. We know about him, what his limitations are, and that he will try his best. He is a decent human being and the contrast between him and Trump is stark in this regard. It will take a long time for the US to repair the wounds of the Trump administration. India has this security blanket vis-a-vis its relationship with the US—China. So Biden will work to help India in the security domain. I doubt you will see the Biden administration trying to fix Kashmir—the last one that did try was John F. Kennedy and we all know the result. The advice Biden will get from his team is that we have too many other problems at home and abroad.

ment to push Xi to deliver on his country's commitments. In addition, he remains aware that the American economy is still deeply intertwined with and dependent on China and will avoid a debilitating confrontation with it. Instead, he has talked about building a coalition of democracies, with India as a key player, to put pressure on China to observe a rules-based international order, freedom of navigation and the law of the sea. As a Biden aide said in a press interview, "It's a possible geopolitical gang-up against China. We need to rally the democratic world together. It cannot be a race to the bottom like a new Cold War." India, for its part, says Tanvi Madan, senior fellow at Brookings Institution, "wants the US to have 'a Goldilocks approach' for putting pressure on China. Not to press too hard to make the situation go out of control and not too little to be ineffective in containing China".

SHOULD INDIA WORRY?

When it comes to relations with the US, India is currently in a sweet spot. Post our nuclear tests in 1998, when relations between the two countries touched a nadir, there has been a steady upward trend, which has gathered even more momentum and substance in recent years. This has happened through three Republican and three Democratic governments and spanning the terms of four presidents, indicating strong bipartisan support. South Block is secretly relieved that they will not have to put up with Trump's yo-yo diplomatic style any more, though Modi had learnt to play the current US president well. Biden's job will be to build on the strong foundation already in place. Aparna Pande, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, says: "Indo-US relations are going to see continuity in terms of the upswing that we have seen in the past two decades, though Biden may not follow the quid pro quo approach that Trump did."

Yet, despite the stability and growth of the Indo-US relationship, concerns remain. Defence cooperation has been the spearhead of the relations between the two countries. The US has not only recognised India as a major defence partner but has also cleared the sale of advanced defence technology, a status accorded only to its closest allies. The past two decades have seen a major growth in US defence sales to India, amounting to close to $20 billion, with more on the anvil. Now that the two countries have signed four

DIA THAN TRUMP?

'THE UPWARD TREND WILL CONTINUE'

NAVTEJ SARNA
Former Indian Ambassador to the United States

Biden's foreign policy machine is well settled. He has a standard Democrat view which will be more systemic, more about engaging with allies and multilateral issues and institutions. All this is good for India. Biden will be tough on China, but in a different way—not by shrieking. When it comes to strategic issues with India, things are fairly well locked in, thanks to four years of work with the Trump administration. On the trade side, I expect an easing up of attitudes and being more reasonable. The human rights issue will come up more. Kashmir will have to be handled better as there are issues of human rights and religious intolerance that may be raised. Overall, we will continue to see an upward trend in Indo-US relations under Biden.

'BIDEN'S PRIORITIES ARE DOMESTIC'

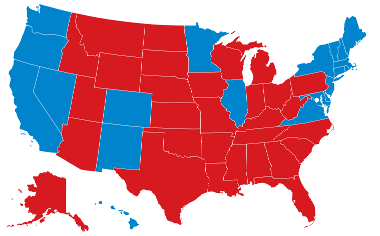
SHIVSHANKAR MENON
Former National Security Advisor and Foreign Secretary

Biden has been very committed in his relationship with India. He helped India during the civil nuclear deal. I don't think we have to worry about his coming. Personally, though, I feel his priorities won't be foreign policy, but domestic issues—getting jobs back, getting manufacturing going and pushing for economic growth. But that doesn't mean we will be let off on the economic (and trade) side. It may well get tougher. I don't see a quick restoration of the Generalized System of Preferences that Trump pulled the plug on. The free pass Trump gave us on issues of human rights will vanish. Plus, because Kamala Harris is of Indian origin, she will have to prove her objectivity, which is not a good thing for India, and Biden and she may be harder on these issues.

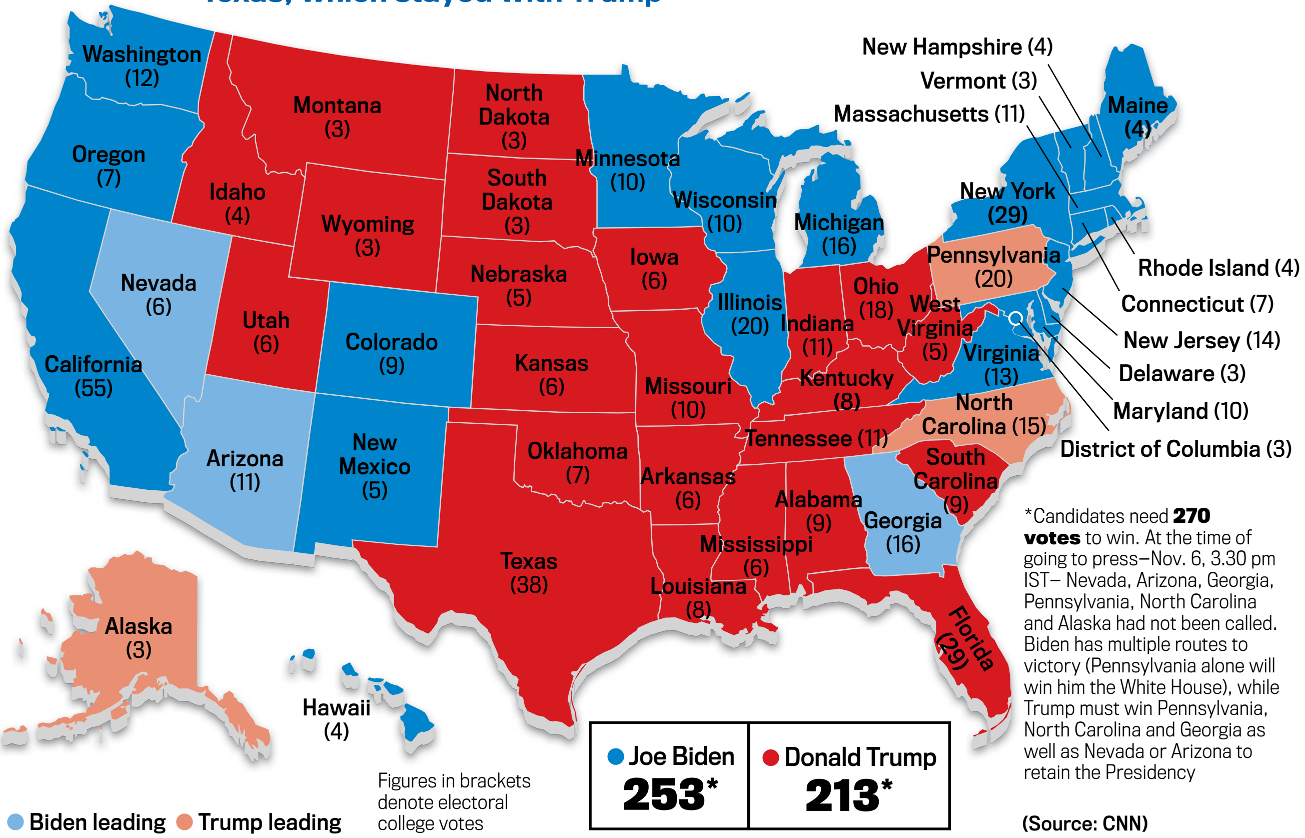
—As told to ***Raj Chengappa***

DIVIDED STATES OF AMERICA

Election 2020 was not the Blue Wave Democrats had hoped it would be, nor could they flip Florida, Ohio or Texas, which stayed with Trump



Election 2016
● Hillary Clinton **232**
● Donald Trump **306**


Washington (12)
Oregon (7)
California (55)
Nevada (6)
Idaho (4)
Montana (3)
Wyoming (3)
Utah (6)
Colorado (9)
Arizona (11)
New Mexico (5)
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South Dakota (3)
Nebraska (5)
Kansas (6)
Oklahoma (7)
Texas (38)
Minnesota (10)
Iowa (6)
Missouri (10)
Arkansas (6)
Louisiana (8)
Wisconsin (10)
Illinois (20)
Michigan (16)
Indiana (11)
Ohio (18)
Kentucky (8)
Tennessee (11)
Mississippi (6)
Alabama (9)
Georgia (16)
Florida (29)
South Carolina (9)
North Carolina (15)
Virginia (13)
West Virginia (5)
Pennsylvania (20)
New York (29)
New Hampshire (4)
Vermont (3)
Massachusetts (11)
Maine (4)
Rhode Island (4)
Connecticut (7)
New Jersey (14)
Delaware (3)
Maryland (10)
District of Columbia (3)
Alaska (3)
Hawaii (4)

● Biden leading ● Trump leading

Figures in brackets denote electoral college votes

● Joe Biden	● Donald Trump
253*	**213***

*Candidates need **270 votes** to win. At the time of going to press–Nov. 6, 3.30 pm IST– Nevada, Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Alaska had not been called. Biden has multiple routes to victory (Pennsylvania alone will win him the White House), while Trump must win Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Georgia as well as Nevada or Arizona to retain the Presidency

(Source: CNN)

foundational agreements (the last one was signed a week before the US elections), the links between their militaries are expected to grow further. However, as Tellis points out, “Defence may be the strongest arrow in the quiver, but India’s a la carte approach on issues is under watch. There is a sense that India needs to step up to the plate and do a lot more.” The US is dismayed by India’s low defence budget of 1.6 per cent of its GDP and its unwillingness to go beyond joint military exercises in its support.

While Biden will continue to strengthen the defence alliance, trade relations had run into rough weather under Trump’s regime. Dubbing India as “the tariff king”, he wanted India to not only lower tariffs but also reduce the $28.9 billion trade deficit. Trump withdrew the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which permitted India to sell over 2,000 goods worth around $6.3 billion duty free to the US, and raised tariffs on steel and aluminium. India retaliated by raising import duty tariffs on over 28 US-manufactured goods. The two sides failed to strike an early harvest trade deal despite a summit meeting between Trump and Modi in February. The US remains concerned with India’s growing protectionism and its Atmanirbhar Bharat drive. Biden is likely to push India to open out its markets more to American companies to arrest the manufacturing slide that the US is currently facing.

Madan of Brookings Institution believes that given the inclination of the US and other countries to reduce their dependence on China, India should move quickly to build global value chains to corner some of that business. The country will become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a two-year term beginning January 2021 and India will be chairing the G20 in 2022. In May, India was elected chair of the WHO’s executive board for a period of three years. Madan urges “India to seize the moment”, build resilience and expand its sphere of influence and power. Biden is keen to prevent China from converting the Asian century into a purely Chinese one. It would be in America’s interest to foster India’s rise to counterbalance China. On immigration, Biden is unlikely to resort to the kind of executive orders that Trump used to put restrictions on skilled Indian workers

SAUL LOEB/ GETTY IMAGES

AP

MEET AND GREET: (left) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Joe Biden, then US vice-president, during a luncheon at the US State Department in Washington D.C. in 2014; Chinese President Xi Jinping with Biden in 2015 at the Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland

migrating to the US. India has to make Biden understand that its diaspora is the umbilical cord that strengthens relations with the US, and any hostile immigration policy will be detrimental to the cause.

Where the Modi government is likely to feel pressure from the Biden administration is on the issues of human rights, treatment of minorities and on religious tolerance. Trump gave India a pass on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the US, along with France, prevented China from taking the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir to the UN Security Council. But Biden and the Democratic Party feel strongly about human rights issues, though, as president, Biden is more likely to discuss his concerns, if any, in private conversations rather than in public. Stimson's Lalwani says when the US talks of shared values, including a vibrant democracy, it upholds India as a model in contrast to the authoritarian and intolerant rule in China. One of the reasons India has been able to build a broad-based constituency in the US is because its political class views us as a liberal democracy, its business sees us as a large market and the strategist community views us as a counterweight to China. He points out, "US administrations believe that India has the national endowment in terms of geography, demography and military capability to play a heavyweight role in the Asian region. But beyond that, there is an expectation that it should be a liberal democratic anchor of the region that is politically stable to be a strong counterpoint to the Chinese model. The entire controversy over the CAA did raise questions in certain influential circles in the US."

When it comes to dealing with Pakistan, the Biden administration is unlikely to go back to the old days of deeper engagement with it or hyphenating it with India. That's because if the Afghanistan pullout goes through, Pakistan's equity will considerably lessen. As Krepon says, "In terms of salience, the LoC has given way to the LAC, given China's recent aggression." But it does suit India for the US to stay engaged with Pakistan so that it can continue to apply pressure on Islamabad not to behave irresponsibly and to curb cross-border terrorism.

★ ★ ★ ★

BIDEN IS KEEN TO PREVENT CHINA FROM MAKING THE ASIAN CENTURY A PURELY CHINESE ONE. IT WOULD BE IN AMERICA'S INTEREST TO FOSTER INDIA'S RISE IN THE REGION

INDIA RETAINS BROAD SUPPORT IN AMERICA AS ITS POLITICAL CLASS VIEWS US AS A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND ITS BUSINESSES SEE A HUGE MARKET

ADNAN ABIDI/POOL/ GETTY IMAGES

FOREIGN EXCHANGE: (from left to right) US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, ahead of the India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi on October 27, 2020

THE KAMALA CONNECTION

One of the big reasons that the Biden presidential campaign drew more than usual attention in India was his choice of Kamala Harris as his running mate. Harris, whose mother came from India and father from Jamaica, enjoys the unique position of being regarded by both Americans of Indian origin and African Americans as one of their own. Her nomination strengthened the support for the Democratic Party among the 1 million-odd voters of Indian origin. When she is sworn in as vice-president on January 20, she will be the first woman of colour to occupy the post.

There have been concerns in some quarters that, as vice-president, she may raise questions about human rights violations in Kashmir. Last year, two months after the Indian government had abrogated Article 370, in answer to a media question, she said, "We have to remind the Kashmiris that they are not alone in the world. We are keeping track of the situation. There is a need to intervene if the situation demands." Harris also expressed concern about foreign minister S. Jaishankar cancelling a scheduled meeting with some members of Congress when he was informed that Pramila Jayapal, a US Congresswoman of Indian origin, was to attend it. Jayapal had earlier moved a resolution critical of the Modi government's handling of Kashmir that failed to pass in the House of Representatives.

Opinion is divided on whether Harris will be good for India or become a pressure point. Menon believes her Indian origin will make Kamala come down on India even harder in order to prove her objectivity and Americanness. Others, like Pande of the Hudson Institute, believe that she will be preoccupied with other domestic issues, and that foreign policy will be the president's domain. However, having been vice-president, Biden just may decide to delegate a lot more authority to her, as Obama did to him. Pande adds a caveat, though: "The president is all-powerful—whatever Biden did as vice-president, it was always regarded as being the Obama presidency."

Harris's advantage is that she checks all the right boxes: she is more liberal and progressive than Biden. She is part of the rainbow coalition in America, which is becoming increasingly important in the country as it undergoes massive demographic changes. She brings a great amount of energy and intelligence to the office. Those who know her say she has the political savvy to grow into the job. Though she may not be an expert on foreign policy and security issues, she is said to be a quick learner and shows obvious promise. Krepon believes that given Biden's age, he is likely to be a one-term president and he may groom her to contest for the presidency after his term is over. Krepon says: "Everyone will be watching carefully how Kamala grows into her power. She is the president-in-waiting." It is appropriate that India welcomes her as one of our own. ■

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AS THE BORDER CRISIS WITH CHINA CONTINUES, THE DEFENCE MINISTRY MOVES TO REVIVE FOUR CRITICALLY REQUIRED WEAPONS PROCUREMENTS. MULTIPLE FACTORS, HOWEVER, PREVENT AN EARLY RESOLUTION

By Sandeep Unnithan

ARMS FREEZE

The defence ministry has been trying to unclog four Indian Army deals worth over $5 billion (Rs 36,000 crore) caught in the pipeline

SELF-PROPELLED AIR DEFENCE GUN MISSILE

104 units

Cost: **$2.5 billion**

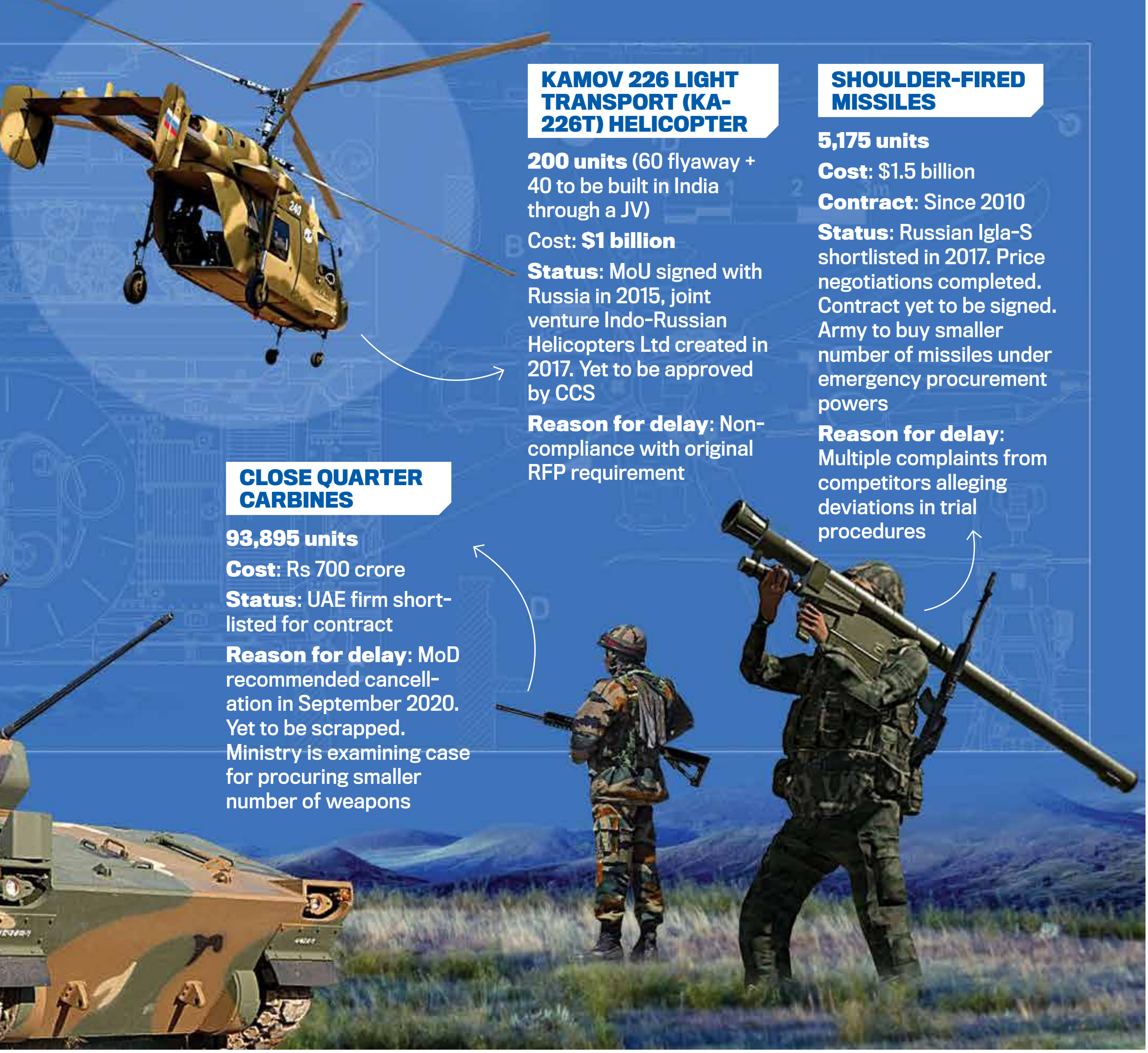
Status: RFP issued in 2013. South Korean firm beat two Russian contenders in trials and emerged as lowest bidder in 2019

Reason for delay: MoD recommended cancellation in September 2020. Yet to be scrapped. Army wants contract to be revived with greater indigenous content

Four big-ticket Indian Army procurements for carbines, mobile air defence gun-missile systems, light helicopters and shoulder-launched missiles worth over $5 billion (Rs 36,000 crore) have been caught in an impasse for several months now. But for the ongoing military standoff with China, delays in acquiring this urgently required hardware would not have spelt a crisis. This is because India's process-driven defence acquisitions move at a snail's pace, with each contract taking an average 7-8 years to be concluded.

These four cases are only part of the Rs 90,048 crore the ministry of defence (MoD) plans to spend on buying new hardware for the forces in the present financial year, minister of state (MoS) for defence Shripad Naik told the Lok Sabha on September 15.

Two cases are particularly urgent as they are meant to replace the army's vintage in-service military hardware. The army's 1970s model Cheetah helicopters used to resupply troops in high altitudes at Siachen and Ladakh and the dwindling stock of shoulder-fired missiles meant to provide low-cost air defence solutions, particularly in the frontlines, are nearing the end of their lifespans. The army needs new air defence gun-missile systems to replace the World War II-era L-70 guns. For three of these imports—light helicopters, air defence guns and carbines—we have indigenous alternatives which are fit cases for the government's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative. Yet, these deals—held up for reasons ranging from deviations in procedure, budgetary constraints, complaints from competitors and a recent renewed thrust for indigenisation—have become a sort of Gordian knot the ministry seems unable to slice through. Adding to the difficulties is the looming shadow of India's largest arms supplier and strategic partner Russia. Russian state-owned firms are in the fray for three of



KAMOV 226 LIGHT TRANSPORT (KA-226T) HELICOPTER

200 units (60 flyaway + 40 to be built in India through a JV)

Cost: **$1 billion**

Status: MoU signed with Russia in 2015, joint venture Indo-Russian Helicopters Ltd created in 2017. Yet to be approved by CCS

Reason for delay: Non-compliance with original RFP requirement

SHOULDER-FIRED MISSILES

5,175 units

Cost: $1.5 billion

Contract: Since 2010

Status: Russian Igla-S shortlisted in 2017. Price negotiations completed. Contract yet to be signed. Army to buy smaller number of missiles under emergency procurement powers

Reason for delay: Multiple complaints from competitors alleging deviations in trial procedures

CLOSE QUARTER CARBINES

93,895 units

Cost: Rs 700 crore

Status: UAE firm shortlisted for contract

Reason for delay: MoD recommended cancellation in September 2020. Yet to be scrapped. Ministry is examining case for procuring smaller number of weapons

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

the big-ticket items and Moscow is believed to have lobbied for stalling the deals at the political level. The UAE government, another country with significant diplomatic heft in New Delhi, owns the firm in the fray for carbines. The defence ministry has held a series of recent meetings to resolve the intractable delays in these cases, but without much success.

THE ETERNAL LOOP

On September 15, the defence ministry made its most determined effort to 'un-jam' three of these procurements. A meeting attended by chief of defence staff Gen. Bipin Rawat, in his capacity as secretary, department of military affairs, vice-chief of army staff (VCOAS) Lt Gen. S.K. Saini and top MoD officials took some swift decisions. It decided to scrap the imports of over 93,000 carbines from UAE's Caracal International LLC (the shortlisted firm) and the self-propelled air-defence gun missile systems (SPADGMS) for which South Korea's Hanhwa Defense had emerged lowest bidder. The carbine deal was scrapped because only one company qualified, an undesirable 'single vendor situation'; the air defence system because of complaints from the Russian competitor alleging deviations in trials.

Over a month later, however, both deals continue to be in limbo and are yet to be scrapped because the army is keen on going ahead with the procurements. Caracal, a subsidiary of the UAE government-owned EDGE group, has now offered local production (earlier all the weapons were to be imported from the UAE under a fast-track procedure). A key defence ministry official has recommended a smaller, off-the-shelf buy of around 25,000 carbines. The army has been advised to extend the life of its 2019 'acceptance of necessity' given for an order of 350,000 carbines to 'buy and make' the weapons in India. The MoD-owned Ordnance Factory Board and private companies like Adani Defence and SSS Defence are in the fray.

It is in the case of the gun-missile system that the de-

lays could be protracted. The army had in 2013 floated a requirement for five regiments of a self-propelled air defence gun-missile system. The 104 units were budgeted at approximately $2.5 billion, with each unit having twin 30 mm cannons and four short-range missiles fitted on a tracked chassis. These self-propelled gun-missile systems are meant to protect vital areas and installations from threats like low-flying aircraft, helicopters and drones. South Korea's K30, made by Hanwha Defense, emerged as the lowest bidder beating out two Russian contenders. Cost negotiations did not proceed after the Russian side objected to their exclusion from the deal. The defence ministry recommended that the deal be scrapped on the grounds that the army's specifications for the contract, dating back to 2011, were nearly a decade old. Hanwha has now offered maximum indigenisation in manufacturing, assembly and integration at existing facilities of Larsen & Toubro or other Indian defence companies, government sources said.

The MoD is also trying to revive a stalled joint Indo-Russian deal to jointly manufacture 200 Ka-226T helicopters. The deal was part of an inter-governmental agreement (IGA) signed in Moscow in 2015 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's summit visit with Russian president Vladimir Putin.

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Russian Helicopters and Russia's state arms exporting firm Rosoboronexport formed a joint venture, Indo-Russian Helicopters Ltd (IRHL), in 2017 with a holding of 50.5 per cent, 42 per cent and 7.5 per cent, respectively, but the deal has not progressed because the MoD has flagged a serious divergence in procedure. The deal has been found to be non-compliant with the original requirement of the request for proposal (RFP)—that the indigenous component must be 70 per cent. The helicopters currently have 70 per cent Russian components and 26 per cent French (the engines). IRHL has said it can achieve 70 per cent indigenous components only in the fourth and final batch of helicopters. Delays in this deal have been a recent bugbear in defence ties between India and Russia and the MoD has suggested that the case be fast-tracked. Government officials say that the army, HAL, IRHL and the MoD have concluded that Russia needs to increase the indigenous content in the helicopters and also transfer critical technologies.

The MoD has two alternatives: altering the RFP requirements, or scrapping the deal altogether. The former would need fresh approvals from the defence acquisition committee (DAC) headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh; scrapping the deal could be difficult since it was part of the 2015 Modi-Putin IGA. But it wouldn't be the first time India has walked out of similar JVs. In July 2018, then defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the government was backing out of the Indo-Russian Fifth General Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) project. The reasons had to do with an increase in costs and the IAF and HAL's unhappiness with the technology being shared.

If the MoD does walk down a similar path with the Ka-226T, it has the homegrown Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) to fall back on. The LUH, designed and built by HAL in a short span of five years, demonstrated its ability to operate in high altitudes in September this year. During 10-day trials, the machine flew from Leh and did a 'hot and high' hover performance at the Daulat Beg Oldie advanced landing ground which, at over 16,000 feet, is the world's highest. HAL officials say the helicopter also demonstrated its payload capability at the Siachen glacier. HAL CMD R. Madhavan says the army version of the LUH is now ready for initial operational clearance (IOC). Government sources, however, say that the LUH's slow rate of induction will not be able to meet the army's needs. "Meeting our requirements in an acceptable time-frame dictates dual route induction of Ka-226 T and the LUH...it was a conscious decision taken back in 2015," says a government official.

THE AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM DEAL HAS BEEN MIRED IN CONTROVERSY EVER SINCE THE FIVE-YEAR-LONG FIELD TRIALS OF THE THREE MISSILE SYSTEMS CONCLUDED IN 2017

THE RUSSIAN MISSILE

In February this year, Gorgen Johansson, president of Saab Dynamics AB, wrote a letter to Rajnath Singh. The chief of Sweden's largest

ANI

BLADE RUNNERS
Defence minister Rajnath Singh meets his Russian counterpart Gen. Sergey Shoigu in Moscow, Sep. 4; trials of the HAL-designed Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) were successful in high altitude 'hot and high' conditions in the Himalayas in end-August

defence firm made serious charges against Russia's Rosoboronexport which had emerged lowest bidder in the Indian army's decade-old search for a new shoulder-fired air defence missile. Johansson said that the Russian firm 'had repeatedly been given undue advantages outside the perimeter of the defence procurement procedure' and hence should have been disqualified. The Russian military was replacing the Igla-S with a newer missile, the Verba, Johansson said, and hence India would not get the benefit of state-of-the-art technology. The letter, which is the second one in two years from the Swedish firm, has put a spoke in the procurement of what the army calls an urgent operational requirement.

The army's search began way back in 2009 with an AON (acceptance of necessity) to buy 5,175 VSHORAD (Very Short Range Air Defence) man portable systems. The missiles were categorised a 'Buy and Make' deal in which the lowest bidding foreign vendor would supply an initial lot of missiles and equipment and transfer technology to an Indian public sector undertaking to manufacture the remaining missiles locally with full transfer of critical technology like the booster and seeker. The deal has been mired in controversy ever since the five-year-long field trials of three missile systems—French, Swedish and Russian—concluded in 2017. Saab's first letter alleging deviations in trials favouring the Russian side was sent in 2018. An MoD-appointed committee that year did not see any deviations in procedure and gave the deal the go-ahead. Fresh complications have arisen with the Russian side refusing to transfer booster and seeker technology. The 2020 letter from the Swedish firm, however, has stalled the deal as the ministry looks for ways to overcome this. One option is to buy a limited number of missiles off the shelf under the fast-track procedure and explore indigenous options later. But unlike the HAL-built light helicopter which can be brought to service within five years, there is no swift indigenous solution here. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has made promises of delivering a man-portable missile in three years but it needs to convince the army that it can do so within the time-frame. The army is procuring a certain quantity of Igla-S missiles through the Rs 500 crore emergency powers route delegated to the VCOAS.

NEEDED, A HOLISTIC REASSESSMENT

Many of these deals have been in the pipeline for close to a decade and from a time when it was assumed defence budgets would increase to keep pace with the growing requirements of the forces. Meanwhile, the standoff in Leh has refocused the army's efforts towards a whole new set of hardware requirements—from drones capable of operating at high altitudes to weapons that can shoot down enemy drones to sensors that can look deep across the LAC in all-weather conditions. It remains to be seen if the army's already constrained budgets will permit these newer acquisitions as well as replace its legacy systems in a unit-for-unit case. "We require a de novo joint service capability review to remove irrelevant procurements, duplication or multiple inventories," says Lt Gen. A.B. Shivane, the army's former DG, Mechanised Forces. Such a capability review would notice, for instance, the multiple inventories created if the MoD went ahead and bought both the Ka-226T and the indigenous LUH, creating two separate production lines for a machine essentially meeting the same requirement. As always, there are no easy solutions without a deep reform of the procurement system. ■

PRASHANT GAURAV GUPTA
Vice-president and Head, DLF Luxury Malls

VISION FOR A LUXE 2020-21

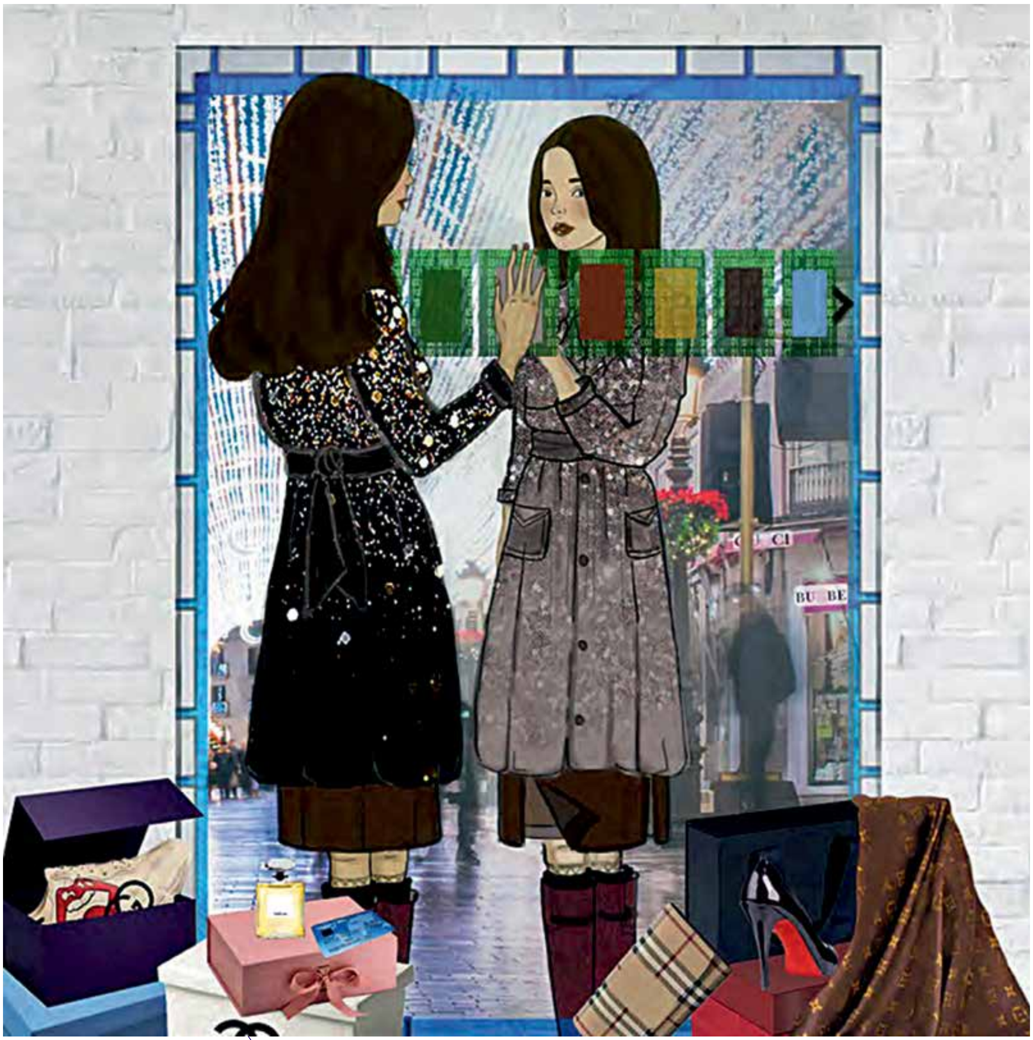


Illustration by PRIYA PATHAK

Augmented reality technology, like smart mirrors, is helping make the retail experience fun

The coronavirus and its socio-economic impact on India and the world is unprecedented. No report, no survey could have predicted a six-month lockdown and life as we knew it coming to a standstill. But then that's a pandemic for you.

And while we are yet to come out of it completely, the Indian luxury industry has been amazing in its bullishness to get back on its branded feet. Even though the past seven months or so of forced confinement have made the well-read and aware consumer introspect more profoundly on their spends, what it has also done is reassured them that their investment in luxury products was never misplaced.

Mind over matter

Luxury is a state of mind achieved by an assurance of unparalleled quality and refinement. People have realised that if you truly want to be sustainable, you need to consume that which will last longer and always inspire joy.

Since 2019, the Indian luxury landscape has been undergoing a shift—from the intent of owning luxury to experiencing it. While for the first decade or so, it was the big international brands that were entering the market, in the past four to five years, we have seen not only a steady growth of homegrown luxury labels but also the entry of niche brands.

Creating experiences is key to this shift. Today's customer knows that the true essence of luxury lies in how one feels when they touch a product and not just in what they see. Also, it is the heritage, craftsmanship, individuality and authenticity of a brand a consumer connects with nowadays. As far as Indian luxury retail is concerned, a continuing trend will be a focus on quality of service. It will be what differentiates one within the luxury segment—how well we serve our customer and the trust we can build with them.

'Tis the season

Earlier, consumers held off on luxury shopping for their international trips but, now, due to Covid-imposed travel restrictions, we are witnessing, and will continue to see, an increased demand and consumption in the luxury goods segment within the country.

At both the luxury malls of DLF—Emporio and The Chanakya—we have seen a significant increase in footfall each month since the unlock. And now, with the festive season here, even more so. In fact, we are matching the numbers we had before the lockdown. But, unlike China, I wouldn't tag this as "revenge buying"! India has never been big on the concept of revenge buying (where one overindulges and goes on a shopping spree after a long period of exercising restraint). Retail has always been about experiences and relationships between a store or a brand and a consumer.

Products offered by Kama Ayurveda, an Indian luxury skin care brand

One of the biggest trends we will likely witness is the increased focus by brands on engaging with consumers, who, in turn, will return to businesses that speak to their individuality. The 2020-21 period will also see the luxury industry pay greater attention to adaptive services and experiences to fit the changing needs of the consumers.

Digital aims

Technology will play a big part in helping brands deliver seamlessly and real-time. Over the past five years, technology has become an essential tool for the luxury businesses and, going forward, we will see an increase in its use and presence. Brands have been steadily experimenting with blockchain in order to ensure authenticity and traceability. With the pandemic increasing online sales for all businesses, digital authenticity will be a top theme for 2020-21.

A rarefied world

Exclusivity has always been fundamental to luxury as it maintains consumer desire through scarcity and rarity. Hence we must achieve a delicate balance between the physical and digital experience. Brands need to actively reach out to their customers with their offering of an on-call personal shopper who will understand their specific requirements, exact sizing options and guide them via video calls to help pick their favourite styles, etc. With the festive season in full swing, people are utilising this service to make their gift-shopping process seamless and comfortable via personal appointments to pick up the final merchandise from the mall.

To summarise, the key trend for the next year in the luxury segment will be an emphasis on curating experiences that include consumers while using technology to provide a certain quality of service and authenticity in product and interaction. After all, a satisfied customer is a repeat customer, and that is the ultimate return on investment. ■

SANDEEP KAUSHIK
Country Manager, India, Sans Souci

TRIP THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

FROM SMART LIGHTING AND DAZZLING PENDANTS TO GRAND CHANDELIERS AND SMALL LAMPS, ILLUMINATION WILL BE KEY TO A DAZZLING DÉCOR THIS FESTIVE SEASON

The festive season is incomplete without the sparkle of lights. In fact, this year, more than ever, with the focus moving inwards, lights will no longer just be an accessory—illumination is in the spotlight. Whether you are planning on using your living spaces to primarily entertain or simply enjoy a family dinner, lighting will have the ability to make or mar the experience. However, with the market full of options, making the right choice can be difficult. Here are the top luxury lighting trends for your home.

Dynamic lighting

Controllability and comfort are crucial for customers. Currently, people are moving away from traditional chandeliers and conventional lamps towards LED and dynamic lights which can be controlled via mobile apps. These dynamic lights can change colour and increase or decrease in intensity with a switch of a button or a swipe of the finger. Also called smart lights, these can connect to the wi-fi and boast a plethora of functions.

Statement decorative lighting

Let's face it, simple lights don't make the cut any more. It's all about the "wow factor" these days. People want to make a statement with decorative lighting pieces akin to works of art. These include playful and awe-inspiring lighting fixtures and installations that feature striking designs in exquisite blown glass and die cast aluminium.

Geometric designs

A contemporary home requires lighting that reflects this style of design. This is why there has been a shift towards geometric wall brackets, pendants, chandeliers and lamps. Think square dangling lights, oval and triangular wall sconces, rectangular floor lamps and abstract rhombus chandeliers. They take centre stage in a home, no matter which room you place them in.

Festive season themed lighting

With the festive season around the corner, lights for celebrations are in vogue. People are choosing lighting fixtures in the shape of bells or flowers (such as marigold) for their temples as well as special nooks in their homes. These lights can be as large as an installation, or small and dainty. Additionally, people desire indirect, soft and soothing lighting during this time. This

(From top) 'Aurora' and 'Twinkle' lighting installations and 'Kerchief' handcrafted lights by Sans Souci

is why festive-themed illumination is not as bright as task lighting; instead they fall in the ambient lighting category, casting a warm glow over the festivities.

Energy-saving and environment-friendly

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that sustainability is the need of the hour. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that the green theme is trending even in lighting. Incorporating energy-saving and environmental-friendly lighting in homes is becoming more and more important to people. We are seeing an increasing trend towards the use of energy-saving LED lights as well as dimmable lights. Almost all high-end illumination devices come with a dimmer, so that the homeowner is able to change the mood in a matter of seconds.

Easy to maintain

With little or no help during the lockdown, there has also been a shift towards low-maintenance designs and products. Similarly, for lighting, devices with a special coating that reduces dust accumulation by 80 per cent are gaining popularity.

Whether you go for a sculptural chandelier or small LEDs, these trends will ensure that the lights you choose will be the highlight of your home. ■

RASEEL GUJRAL ANSAL
Interior Architect and Co-founder, Casa Paradox Luxe

LIVING LARGE

MALACHITE PLATES, ROCK CRYSTAL CANDLE STANDS, GOLD-PLATED FORKS AND SPOONS AND CASHMERE FURNISHINGS—2020 WILL BE ALL ABOUT INVESTING IN PERSONALISED, HIGH-END DÉCOR

Rock crystal obelisks (left); and a malachite chair by Casa Paradox Luxe

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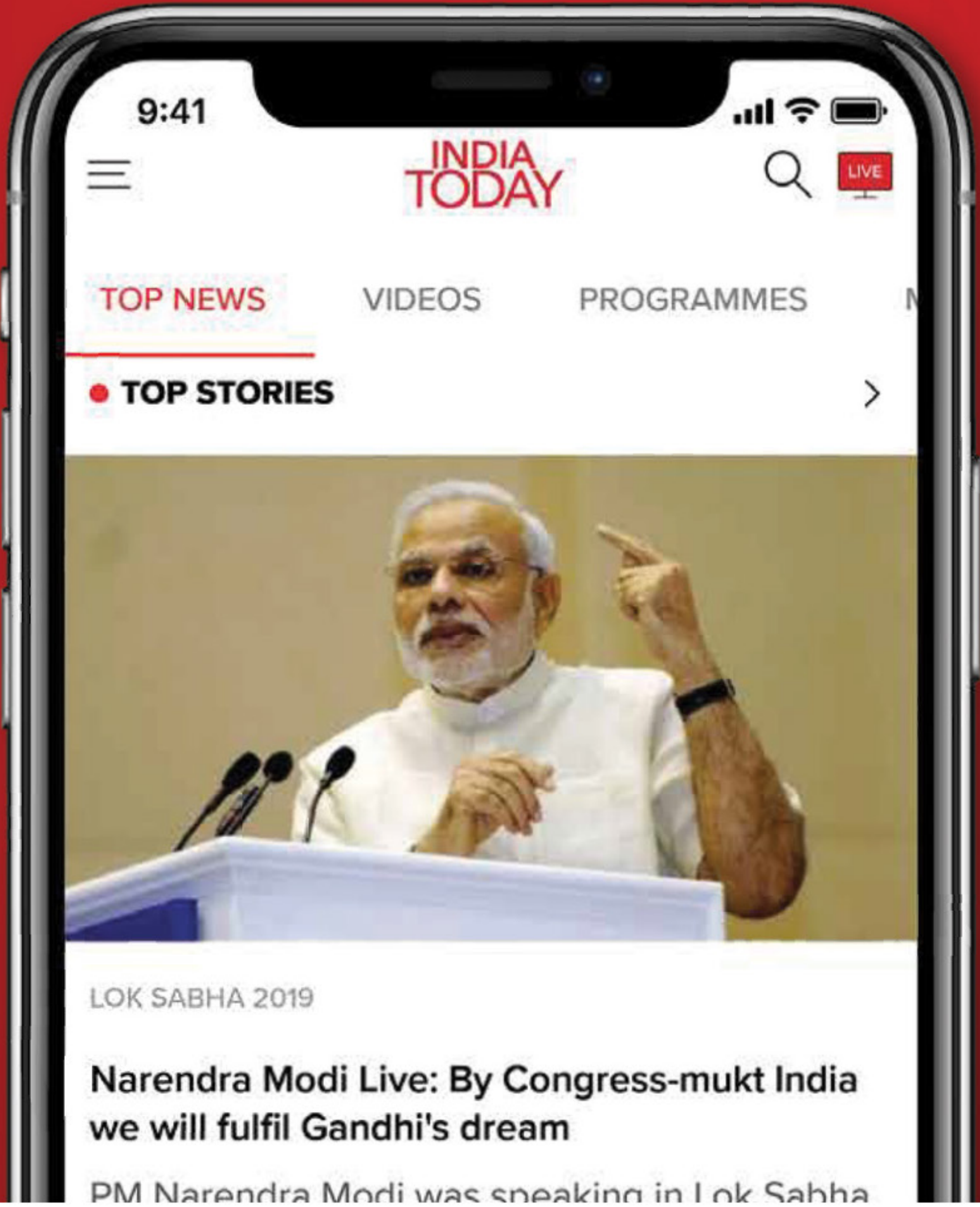
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PM Narendra Modi was speaking in Lok Sabha

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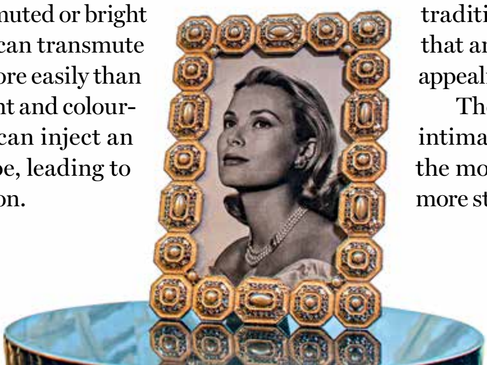
Malachite and porcelain serve ware; and (below) a photo frame with 24 karat gold, platinum and Swarovski crystal embellishment by Casa Paradox Luxe

Luxury by definition cannot be seasonal. The pursuit and the subsequent attainment of an object of one's desire is equivalent to a love affair. This year, more than any other, it is about preciousness. Time is precious, friends are precious, while occasions are smaller. Therefore, people are focusing on making gifting and décor more intimate and special. It is not just about a few cushions and lights any more, people are investing in bespoke items for their homes.

This festive season is about luxury you can invest in and not an object for one-time use. Semi-precious stones such as onyx and malachite have a timeless appeal that is worth spending on. We are seeing them on everything—from plates to accessories and lamps. Another material that's gaining momentum for the right reasons is high-quality porcelain with intricate detailing. Gold-plated cutlery, a beautiful bar cart or rock crystal obelisk—statement pieces like these are going to add that grandiose element within the home since everyone is spending more time indoors.

The drama in design this year will start from the entrance itself, with beautiful sculptural inserts. Of course, there is no luxury like original art. An inspiring canvas or sculpture never fails to give back joy. Colour, whether muted or bright and bold, in its own right can transmute mood and temperature more easily than any other medium. A bright and colourful digital art on canvas can inject an instant dose of playful vibe, leading to an effortless transformation.



Also in fashion right now is glitz and glamour, which one will see on the dining table. Instead of simple sit-down dinners, to maintain social distancing, buffet style tables will be laid. The dining area will be dressed in the best. Think large centrepieces, tall candles, high-end serve ware and floral arrangements made up of Indian flowers. A meal enhanced with the right décor on the table turns even the most banal repast into a feast.

When it comes to soft furnishings, velvets and cashmere in a combination of natural and jewel tones are a must. From cushions in Nakkashi fabric to an investment in some cashmere blankets, the idea is to experience personalised luxury. It pampers and seduces, encouraging hibernation and nesting. Printed patterns will be added as layers, such as a cushion or a throw on a few chairs. There will be more tonal pieces with one bright one such as an emerald or garnet sofa to make a statement. A cooler clime also provides the perfect occasion to introduce a show-stopping area rug, which simultaneously adds pattern, colour, character, tactile comfort and warmth underfoot.

An infusion of colour, from the muted to the striking, highlights the beauty of contrast with the elegance of rich materials. The living spaces will encapsulate boldness in furniture design, transcending the obvious and transforming the echoes of the past, be it traditional motifs or neo-classical details that are inherently lavish and intrinsically appealing.

The celebrations are going to be more intimate this year with people who matter the most, so luxe décor and design will be more striking than ever. ■

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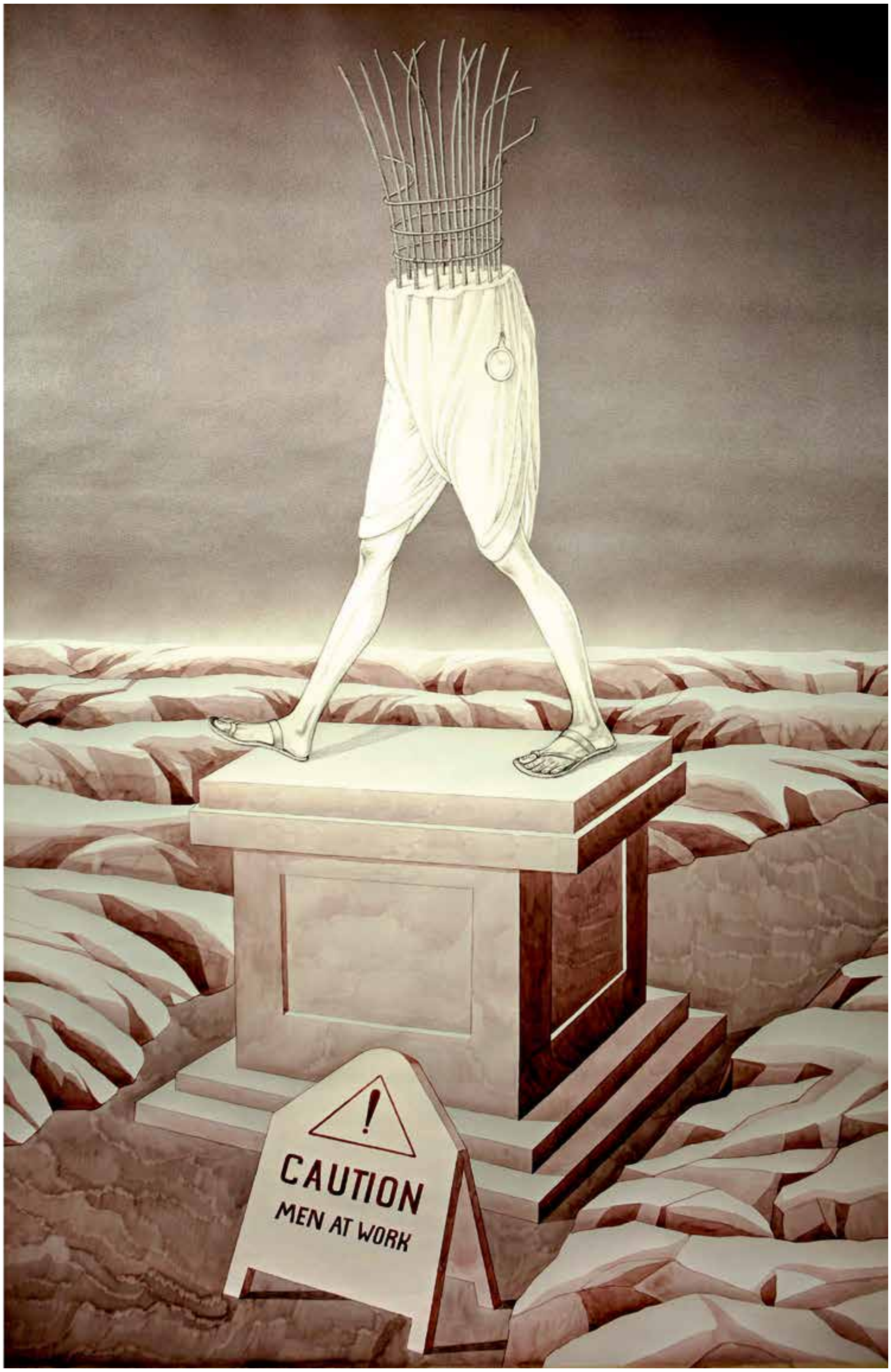
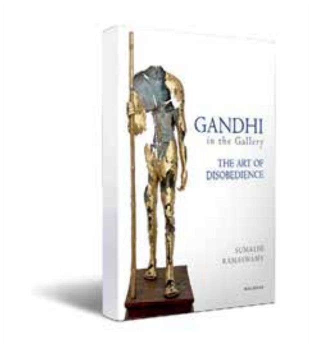


BOOKS

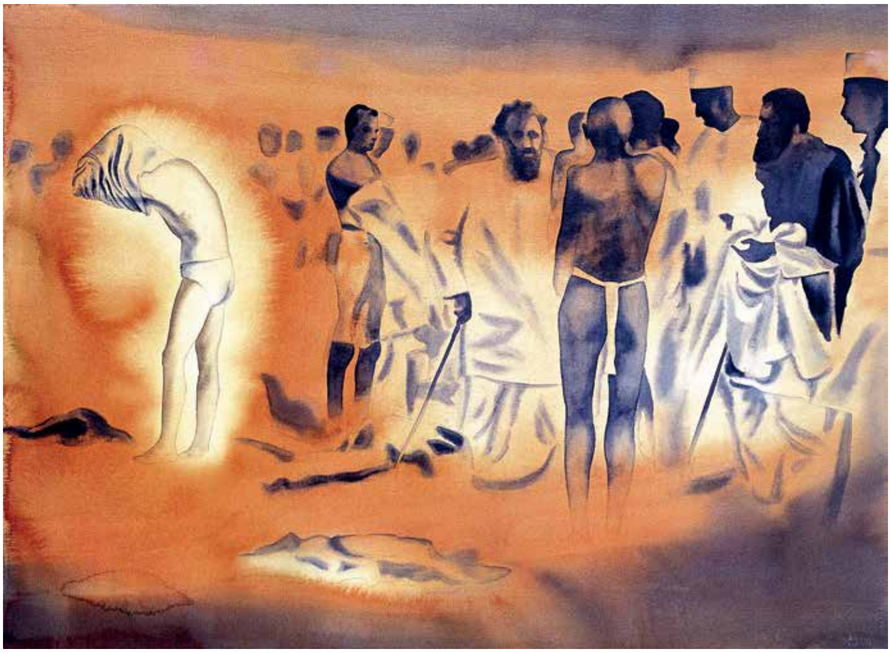
THE ART OF BEING GANDHI

An icon in his lifetime, the 'father of the nation' has had a colourful parallel existence in the art world as a new book reveals

Artist Gigi Scaria's 'Caution! Men at Work', 2015



GANDHI IN THE GALLERY
The Art of Disobedience
by Sumathi Ramaswamy
ROLI BOOKS
₹**1,495**; **224** pages



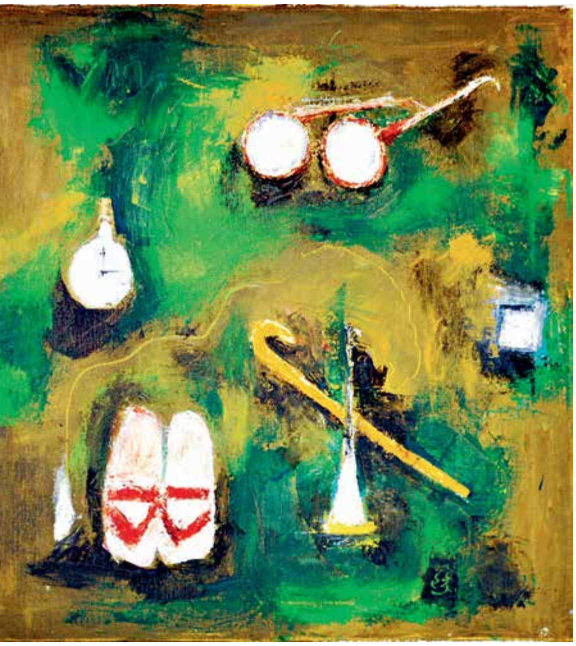
In February 2010, the famous Montblanc Company withdrew the sale in India of their luxury Mahatma Gandhi pen, priced at Rs 14 lakh a piece. Good sense and the threat of legal action had prevailed, for the Swiss producers were in clear violation of the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950, which, incidentally, brought "the name or pictorial representation of Mahatma Gandhi" within its ambit only in 1959. The company, whose trademark Montblanc pens stick demonstrably out of the pockets of our elite countrymen, were clearly appealing to the vanity of the super rich: with a little pressure of the writing finger, blue or black ink would flow literally through a small opening in the left shoulder of a stenciled image of a gold-plated Walking Gandhi. At the other end, in 1921, a Gandhi rubber stamp, with customised name and address, was on offer for Rs 3.50—quite high for its time—as letterhead for the District Congress Committees that were spearheading the Gandhi-led Non-cooperation Movement. Over the years, Gandhi image-making has indeed seen its highs and lows.

Sumathi Ramaswamy, a historian of prints and images—visual history as it is called in the trade—has now put together a magnificent book of paintings, sculptures and artworks on and about Gandhi. Assembled here are artistic creations and commentaries on both the Mahatma and us inheritors of the nation that he forged into being, made unrecognisable by the violence of Partition riots. Some of our most innovative artists, past and present, are showcased here. *Gandhi in the Gallery* is not the usual glossy catalogue, with brief captions, dates and names of the artists that we find in art galleries and museums. Ramaswamy has on offer a virtual feast for the eye and the mind, and something more in addition. She has coupled the images of the artists with Gandhi's own thoughts and words. The editor has trawled through the hundred volumes of his *Collected Works* (counting the Index) to cull appropriate quotations to help readers' eyes travel from image to text and back. Instead of capturing Gandhi from an indifferent childhood to his epochal martyrdom/ assassination, the book focuses on the artworks connected with the different facets of his life—the dress, or the lack of it, his walks, his fasts—and detailed commentaries on all these by Gandhi himself.

Sumathi Ramaswamy, in *Gandhi in the Gallery,* has coupled the images of the artists with Gandhi's own thoughts and words

Our eyes have got so fixated on the imagery of the "loin cloth", the "half-naked fakir" of Churchill's scornful jibe, that Gandhi-the-sparsely-clad has become a well-meaning cliche. Gandhi had won a famous victory for the Champaran peasants fully clad in his Gujarati attire, and without the *lathi*. A woodcut print by Lalit Mohan Sen, 'Mahatma Gandhi, c. 1922' portrays him at the time of 'Chauri Chaura', unrecognisable as the Mahatma he had already become.

The "loin cloth", despite Gandhi's own description, cautions Ramswamy, was a shortened *dhoti*, and not the sadhu/ *pahelwan* non-attire, though, arguably, it did denote celibacy. Atul Dodiya's 'Sea-Bath (Before Breaking the Salt Law)', painted in 1998, portraying Gandhi in conversation with his Dandi march associates clad only in a *langot*, might scandalise us, but it is an artist's representation of a well-known photograph taken on April 6, 1930, the day he scooped up a fistful of salt in defiance of the law and the authority of the Raj. Or look at Ramkinkar Baij's 'Dandi March-II'. Modelled first in plaster of paris and cast later in bronze, here Gandhi's *lathi*, his feet, as well as a downcast head seem frozen stiff. Comments Ramaswamy: "The memory of the Mahatma's lonely



'Sea-Bath (Before Breaking the Salt Law)', 1998, by Atul Dodiya (left); and 'Gandhi and His Things', 2013, by Haku Shah

walk on bare feet in Noakhali likely haunted Baij, as did the fact that the pair of walking feet had been stilled forever by 1948."

Gandhi in the Gallery is not confined to picturing Gandhi and his times; it is equally about the Mahatma's prized possessions. In 'Gandhi and His Things', the great Gandhian Haku Shah paints the iconic *dhoti*-watch—Gandhi wore no pockets—his glasses, spun yarn and leather sandals that he proudly crafted himself, arraying these casually in a swirling sea of green and yellow. Gandhi's watch which is stuck forever at 5.17 pm, registers its presence in several other artworks as well. Pore carefully over the beautifully studded panorama, 'Ahmedabad, the City Gandhi left Behind', by the master artist Gulam Mohammed Sheikh, and you will find the watch along with Gandhi's eating bowl in the bottom middle.

Gandhi was assassinated at 5.17 pm on Tees January Marg (then Albuquerque Road). Growing up in the 1960s, we "midnight's children" knew only of the two minutes at 11 o'clock on that day when we all stood up in our classes to remember briefly Gandhiji and his life. Even if incongruous, a community of purpose got created. Condoling 5.17 pm over evening cups of tea with our parents, individually in our own homes, would have, I now think, fractured our teenage solidarity with the Mahatma who literally came before our time. ■

—Shahid Amin

*A former Professor of History at Delhi University, **Shahid Amin** is the author of* Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992

Facing the Music

How musical was the Mahatma? It's complicated...

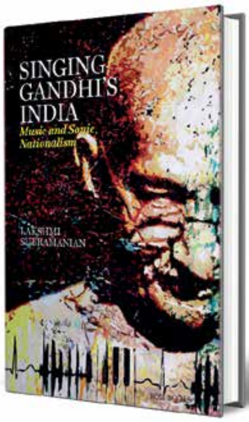
Henry Ford, the American car capitalist, is best known for two things: first, the mass-produced, affordable Ford Model; and second, the remark that "History is one damn thing after another". Much has changed since Model T rolled out in 1908—'Aspire' and 'Freestyle' Models have now hit the Indian market in the under Rs 600,000 range. We have newer types of histories as well—visual histories, histories of emotions and belief and, as with Lakshmi Subramanian's new book, a history of music during the heady but difficult times of the Gandhi-led march to our freedom.

Singing Gandhi's India is a title that both entices and provokes. It invites us to share in the devotion, delight and yearning of our colonised people as they broke into *dhuns*—*Ramdhuns* as modified by Gandhi, evoking a commonality of belief—*bhajans*, Bankim's *Vande Mataram* and politically and socially revolutionary sentiments, often set to marching tunes. The book gives us a ringside view of the tricky yet inflammable issue of what was music to one community sounding like cacophony and a disturbing amplification of noise to another. This, and the conflict that it generated between communities in the mid-1920s, was the cause of much concern for Gandhi as he strove to foster commonality and a kinship of shared sentiments.

GANDHI insisted on a strict musical regimen at his ashram—for everyone, the morning began with community singing

As with much else, Gandhi insisted on a strict musical regimen at his *ashram*—for everyone, the day began with early-morning community singing. He even invited accomplished musicians to sing on the banks of the Sabarmati. As to Gandhi's considered views on the joys of music, he was again elliptical in that special Gandhian way: "I have discovered no easy way of enjoying the music of songs. I cannot, therefore, easily drink in the joy they are capable of giving." ■

—Shahid Amin



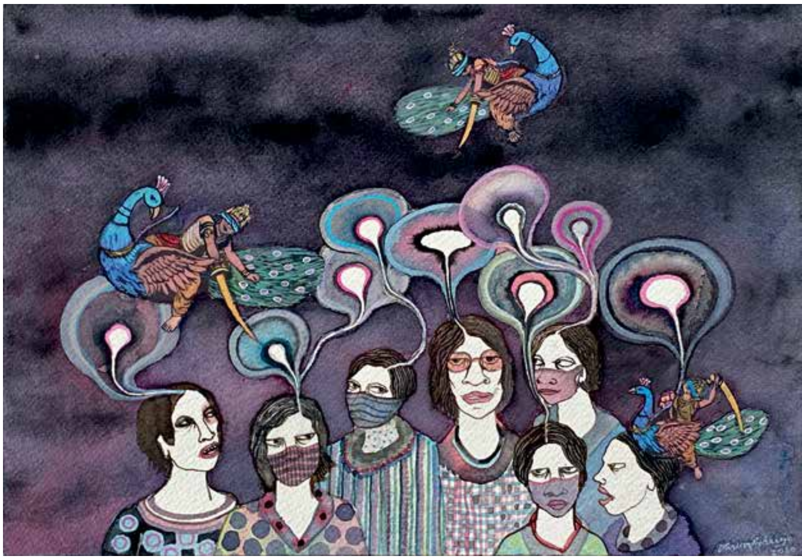
SINGING GANDHI'S INDIA
Music and Sonic Nationalism
By Lakshmi Subramanian
ROLI BOOKS
₹495; **240** pages

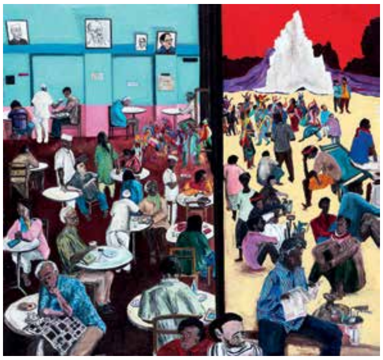
ART

Art for the Binge-watcher

Virtual platforms are breaking the barriers of social distancing with new ways of exhibiting art

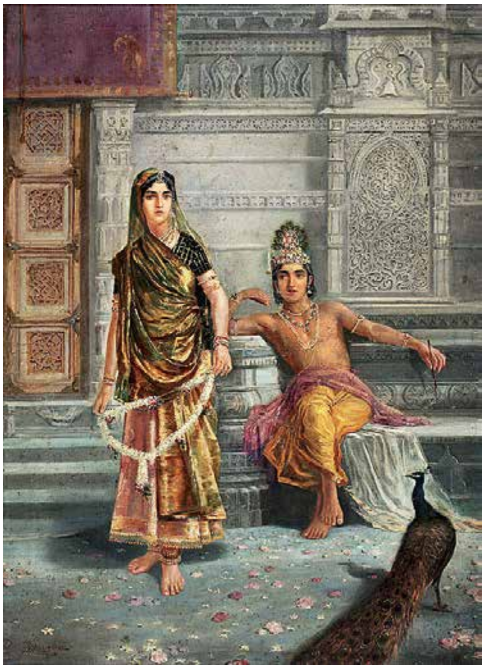
DHRUVI ACHARYA AND NATURE MORTE





courtesy NITYAN UNNIKRISHNAN AND CHATTERJEE & LAL

courtesy DAG



'Evaporating Voices' by Dhruvi Acharya (top); 'The Half of It', 2020, by Nityan Unnikrishnan (left); and 'Radha and Krishna' by M.V. Dhurandhar (on display in DAG's *The World Will Go On*

You might think that visual artists have had it better than most during the Covid-propelled lockdown—and you would be right. Most artists work alone—and display only needs to shift from the clean white 3D cube of the art gallery to the 2D rectangle of the digital screen. So even as the lockdown left a series of shuttered shows in its wake, many galleries rose to the challenge. One exciting development has been In Touch, a digital platform created collaboratively by galleries across India (Artintouch.in/).

Edition 4 of In Touch, which runs till November 10, includes Rustom Siodia's little-seen 1920s and '30s watercolours on the Chatterjee and Lal site, Kanu Gandhi's astonishingly intimate photographs of the Mahatma on PhotoInk, Dhruvi Acharya's arresting pandemic-inspired work at Nature Morte, and Buddhadev Mukherjee's marvellously humorous human figures, playful studies in scale, at Mirchandani + Steinruecke. Chemould Prescott Road is showing Lavanya Mani's 'Game of Chance', mixing science with miracles and omens in a manner

Art Restart

① Nityan Unnikrishnan's solo show ***It is Getting Louder***, showing at Mumbai's Chatterjee and Lal gallery from November 13 to January 2, feels very much like India right now. The acrylic images on khadi spill over with people: reading, eating, dreaming, waiting. The other set of the images, graphite on muslin or bamboo fibre paper, are abstract, filled with black and white forms which could be anything: masts, mountains, plants, porcupines. All that unites them is their jaggedness.

② Art Heritage Gallery, Delhi, together with Kolkata's Seagull Foundation, is showing ***The Self Portrait***, a show of early and rare woodblock prints, sketches and watercolours by the late K.G. Subramanyan, who died in 2016, aged 92. They aren't all depictions of the artist: watch out for 'Jangpura Women' (1950), and many striking untitled linocuts and litho prints of seated women. Open by appointment till December 15.

③ DAG's ***The World Will Go On***, on view online since October 25, will be open to visitors at The Claridges, Delhi, between November 2 and 12. Highlights include a 1980 Raza, an M.F. Husain Hanuman, Nandalal Bose's 'Diwali', and one of Krishen Khanna's *bandwalla* images.

④ Prasanta Sahu ***Suburban Shadows***, on the Emami Gallery website till November 30, visibilises the links between rural and urban through his perfect for a pandemic year. In 'Miraculous Sights 2', a town floats into the sea aboard a ship, which itself hovers over the scaly back of a submarine creature. In the hypnotic 'Portents', a gigantic red flower opens a bleeding glass eye to a world buffeted by strange animal-headed comets.

In Touch's on-screen display is effective: you can see a chosen artwork as it might look on a wall (with a virtual chair for scale) and zoom in. I wish, though, that more galleries had done what Gallery Espace has with Manjunath Kamath's dream-like pastiches—to identify sections of each work for higher-resolution reproduction. It feels like a privilege to have his strange, vivid imagination enlargeable on one's private screen: a pile of books in flames as an elephant grazes placidly in a field outside, a television splashing into a bathtub, an angel approaching a Mumbai taxi, or a giraffe a buffet.

Others, too, have made efforts online. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art has a superb virtual tour. Kolkata's CIMA has a new website. The uncertainty of recent months seems to have pushed the artistic process into the foreground. Mumbai's Tarq Gallery is presenting Garima Gupta's notes and sketches from the Southeast Asian wildlife trade—"unarchived fragments of a conflict that is pushing us into a war with the very world we inhabit". Nature Morte offers up a downloadable colouring book by Acharya, while Kolkata's Emami Gallery has devised a virtual flipbook. The flipbook is a great format both for Prasanta Sahu's *Suburban Shadows* (see below) and *Aroh*, a group show that came out of Emami's open call for lockdown work by young artists (I particularly liked Arindam Sinha's 'Marking', Arpita Akhanda's 'Hung Up On the Past' and Jahnavi Khemka's 'Lockdown 1'). Finally, the digital crossing of geographical limits allowed us to view, sitting in India, 35 sketches from the late great modernist Ram Kumar's 1960s and '70s notebooks on Art Basel's Online Viewing Rooms.

But while the hushed silences and 'no touching' rules of the gallery may feel only a step away from the literal untouchability of a virtual display, an aura still clings to the work of art in the era of digital reproduction. Three of the five shows to look out for this month—at DAG and Art Heritage Galleries in Delhi, and at Chatterjee and Lal in Mumbai—are open for offline visitors. ■

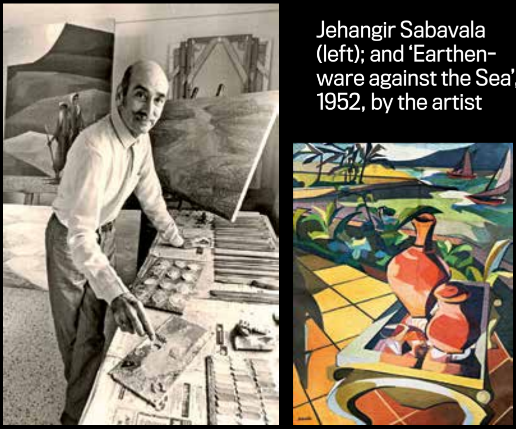
Art galleries, by embracing the virtual world, rose to the challenge thrown by the pandemic

–Trisha Gupta

studies of food and farming: a lettuce in a shopping cart, vegetables sprouting from human limbs, a *bhindi* as skeleton, shadows of the labouring body.

5 ***Five Million Incidents***, a set of public art interventions funded by the Goethe Institute, has been reconceptualised in digital form. Visit Goethe.de/ins/in/en/ver.cfm to join the imaginary chatroom of Ranjana Dave's *Age Sex Location*, add to Sultana Zana's *Fieldness*, a collaborative digital archive of time spent in nature in the city, or log in to play Shraddha Borawake's virtual game *Chaat Meets... A New World Order* on November 7. ■

–Trisha Gupta



Jehangir Sabavala (left); and 'Earthenware against the Sea', 1952, by the artist

THE PARSI PILGRIM

A new show on the late **Jehangir Sabavala** explores his enigmatic interplay of light on landscapes

Mumbai's Akara Art gallery's latest, *Pilgrim Souls, Soaring Skies, Crystalline Seas*, opened recently with Covid guidelines in place. The show, on till December 10, covers Jehangir Sabavala's seven-decade-long artistic sprawl with 15 paintings from different phases of his life. "At least 11 of these have never been in public view before," promises Akara Art founder Puneet Shah. One of them, 'Elegy' (1967), was traced to a private stash in Switzerland. Rendered in a mixture of abstract and cubism with a tender palette, 'Elegy', the owner had hoped, would "someday return to India, where he felt it truly belonged".

For long, Sabavala's fame was obscured by the haze of the more popular post-Independence artists such as M.F. Husain, S.H. Raza and Tyeb Mehta. But in the past few years, demand for his works has surged. Born into a Parsi family in 1920s Bombay, Sabavala's first love was the stage. But being painfully shy, painting and its attendant anonymity offered him both a refuge as well as freedom. He studied in London and post-war Paris, where he met his wife, Shirin. When he returned to a free India, the Bombay artscape was dominated by the Progressive Artists' Group. A modernist like them, the artist who died in 2011 aged 89, never fully qualified as a cubist or an impressionist, though he borrowed from both. Instead he saw himself, as he once told *Deccan Herald*, "as a pilgrim, moving towards unknown vistas".

Renowned as much for his old-school charm, complete with a Dali-esque stache, as for his serene landscapes and solitary figures, the exhibition also affirms his lifelong quest for perfection. Many with knowledge of his art will find familiar motifs in 'Pilgrim Souls...'. There's the sea, harbour and headlands along with peripatetic shepherds and monks in quiet contemplation. But the show's real aim is to highlight his mastery over light. Ranjit Hoskote, Sabavala's official biographer, says: "Across the 1960s and 1970s, the presence of light–dawn's radiance, sunlight diffused through mist, the twilight–became one of his key subjects." This meticulous engagement with nature transformed a simple landscape into what Henri Matisse called "art of purity and serenity". ■

For a painfully shy **JEHANGIR SABAVALA,** painting and its attendant anonymity offered a refuge as well as freedom

–Shaikh Ayaz

FILM

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

Not one to admit defeat easily, Fatima Sana Shaikh is slowly and steadily carving a space for herself in a cut-throat industry

Fatima Sana Shaikh had it all going for her. After a couple of blink-and-miss roles, she bagged a key part in *Dangal,* playing the rebellious daughter to Aamir Khan's stern patriarch Mahavir. The film earned Rs 374 crore at the box office, second only to *Baahubali: The Beginning,* Indian cinema's highest-earning film. She soon landed a plum role in Yash Raj Films' *Thugs of Hindostan* with Khan and Amitabh Bachchan as her co-stars. It seemed that nothing could stop Shaikh from fulfilling her dream to be successful in the industry in which she started out as a child actor (*Chachi 420*). However, after *Thugs* crashed at the box office, Shaikh wondered if her days were numbered. "It was hated and how!" says Shaikh. "I was heartbroken."

She lost projects. It didn't help that as a newcomer and an "outsider", she knew little of how the film industry functions. So she did what everybody does: got a public relations agency to promote her. But then she asked herself what would she talk about? Says Shaikh, "What's the point of giving interviews if there's nothing to talk about?"

After her success in Dangal, the actress ran out of luck in Thugs of Hindostan, but she's back with a brace of new launches on OTT platforms

Two years after the Diwali debacle that was *Thugs*, the 28-year-old finally has something to say with not one but two releases lined up for the festive season. First up is *Ludo* on Netflix on November 12, followed by *Suraj Pe Mangal Bhari* arriving the next day. The first is an ensemble crime caper in which she plays a young mother who uses her besotted classmate (Rajkummar Rao) to help her; in the other, also a comedy, she is a woman shuttling between being an ideal sister and a carefree girlfriend. Shaikh is relieved that the films are out even if it is on streaming platforms. "There is a nervousness to be seen. If you are not visible, especially when there's so much content out there, then people forget. And it's not their fault," she says. "Films are all I have to be relevant."

Suraj, she says, came to her when life was in limbo post *Thugs*. She ran into Abhishek Vyas, then a producer at Zee Studios, and candidly told him, "*Main berozgaar hoon, kuchh hai toh bata dena* (I am jobless. If there's something, please let me know)." She was called for a narration and instantly identified with the duplicity of her character. "I have lived that life when I was a teenager," says Shaikh. "Saying that you don't have male friends and lying that you are at a friend's place so that you can go to a concert in Pune." With Manoj Bajpayee and Diljit Dosanjh already on board, she knew she had found the film to restart.

Shaikh cites the example of actors like Bajpayee along with Shah Rukh Khan and Priyanka Chopra-Jonas to illustrate that success and fame is not elusive to outsiders. But the road for them, she adds, has a set of challenges that those with families in show business don't face. "They get work and many chances, but nepotism is in every industry, be it politics or business." Shaikh is open about her struggle. "There are times I have been mistreated when I have played character roles," she says. "I am not somebody who holds grudges. It is a cut-throat and ruthless business. I know what I have gotten into."

Five years in the industry and Shaikh is finding her feet gradually. "She's not rushing but thinking and slowly carving a space," says casting director Mukesh Chhabra who vividly remembers how she entered with a tomboyish attitude to audition for *Dangal*. Chhabra credits her resilience that has ensured she didn't fade despite the setback. Meanwhile, Shaikh is getting the hang of the industry and the self-promotion it demands. "It's exhausting but it is part of the game," she says. And Shaikh is here to play for the long haul. ■

–Suhani Singh

FESTIVE SPIRIT

Hindi film releases to watch out for in the run up to Diwali

LAXMII
Disney+ Hotstar, November 9
Akshay Kumar stars in this horror-comedy, a remake of popular Tamil franchise, *Muni*. Kumar's Asif, a ghost agnostic man, gets possessed by a transgender spirit with vengeance on her mind. That the transformation happens at his in-laws' house creates more chaos.

LUDO
Netflix, November 12
Anurag Basu's action-comedy follows multiple journeys—of Abhishek Bachchan as a kidnapper; of Rajkummar Rao as he helps his unrequited love (Fatima Sana Shaikh) with a jailbreak operation; and Pankaj Tripathi's gangster's as he chases two on-the-run couples.

SURAJ PE MANGAL BHARI
November 13
Manoj Bajpayee plays a detective specialising in background checks of prospective grooms. Diljit Dosanjh is a vengeful suitor, who, after his proposal is rejected, decides to get even with the detective by wooing his sister (Fatima Sana Shaikh).

CHHALAANG
Amazon Prime Video, November 13
Rajkummar Rao plays a lackadaisical PT teacher Montu who takes on a peer (Zeeshan Ayyub) in a sporting contest in the battle to save his job and win over his love.

Q+A

‘I’m very hungry as an actor’

Rajkummar Rao on the blurring lines between OTT and theatre and keeping an eye out for the next exciting opportunity

Q. You have two online releases—*Ludo* and *Chhalaang*—coming up. Is 2020 when the lines between OTT and theatre get blurred?
Certainly. The kind of love shows like *Paatal Lok* and *Mirzapur* have got is huge. The actors in it have become popular, like Jaideep [Ahlawat], my classmate from FTII. OTT will be a very strong, parallel industry. People want to see good content regardless of medium.

Q. Jaideep, you and Vijay Varma are graduates of the 2008 acting batch. Back then, did you imagine that you would find a foothold in the film industry?
That was the plan but we didn’t think it would happen. When I see people from FTII—Divyenndu, Rasika (Dugal) or Faisal (Rashid) on screen, I get so happy. After watching *Paatal Lok*, I was so proud Jaideep was getting what he deserves.

Q. You performed a brief piece for mental health awareness online. Given how little it takes to trigger trolls, was there apprehension on your part?
None at all. I liked that it wasn’t preachy but more like a conversation between loved ones. I didn’t think of how people are going to react to it. Your intent has to be right. I just recited it wholeheartedly.

Q. Is it easier now for you to find leading parts?
I am very hungry as an actor. If tomorrow I find out that Sriram (Raghavan) or Imtiaz (Ali) are planning a film, I don’t mind reaching out to them and saying, ‘Sir, why not [cast] me?’ I don’t mind a screen test. There is amazing work happening outside Hindi film industry too. I wish I knew more languages so I could work in all kinds of films.

—with Suhani Singh

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

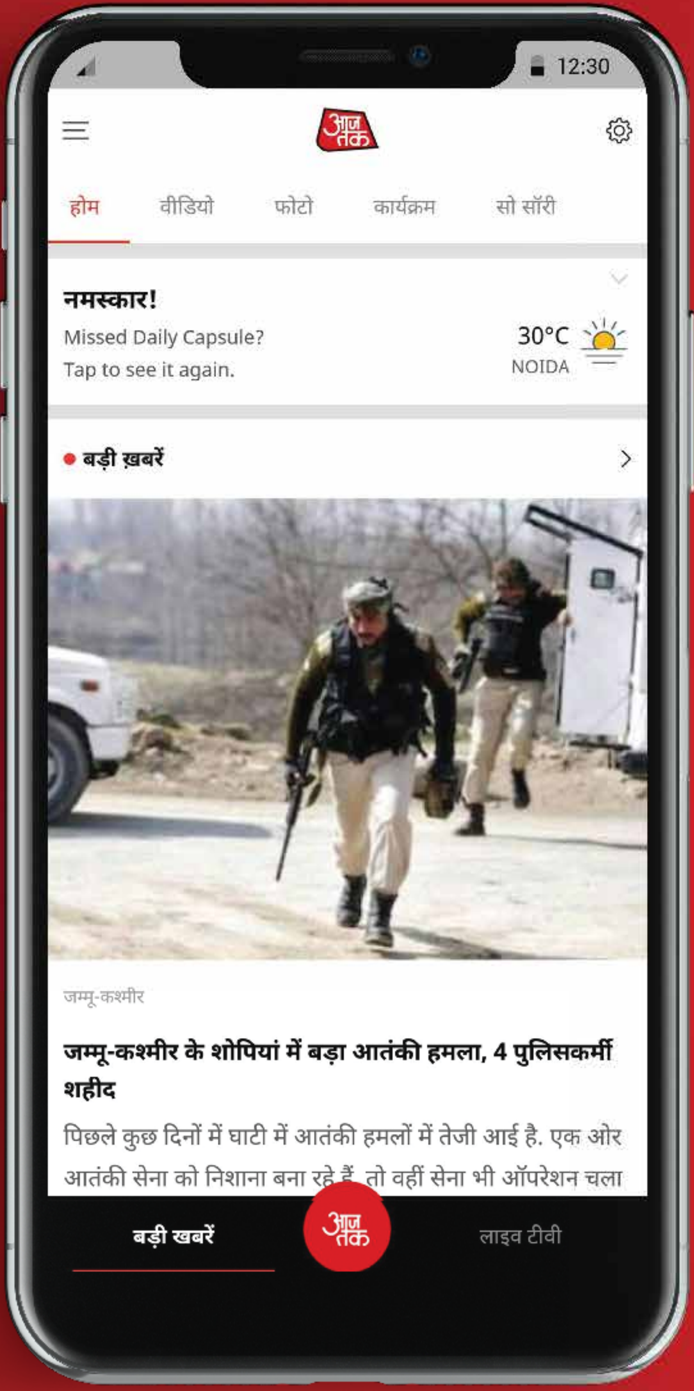
देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है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नमस्कार!

Missed Daily Capsule?
Tap to see it again.

बड़ी ख़बरें

जम्मू-कश्मीर

जम्मू-कश्मीर के शोपियां में बड़ा आतंकी हमला, 4 पुलिसकर्मी शहीद

पिछले कुछ दिनों में घाटी में आतंकी हमलों में तेजी आई है. एक ओर आतंकी सेना को निशाना बना रहे हैं, तो वहीं सेना भी ऑपरेशन चला

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